ELLERY QUEEN®

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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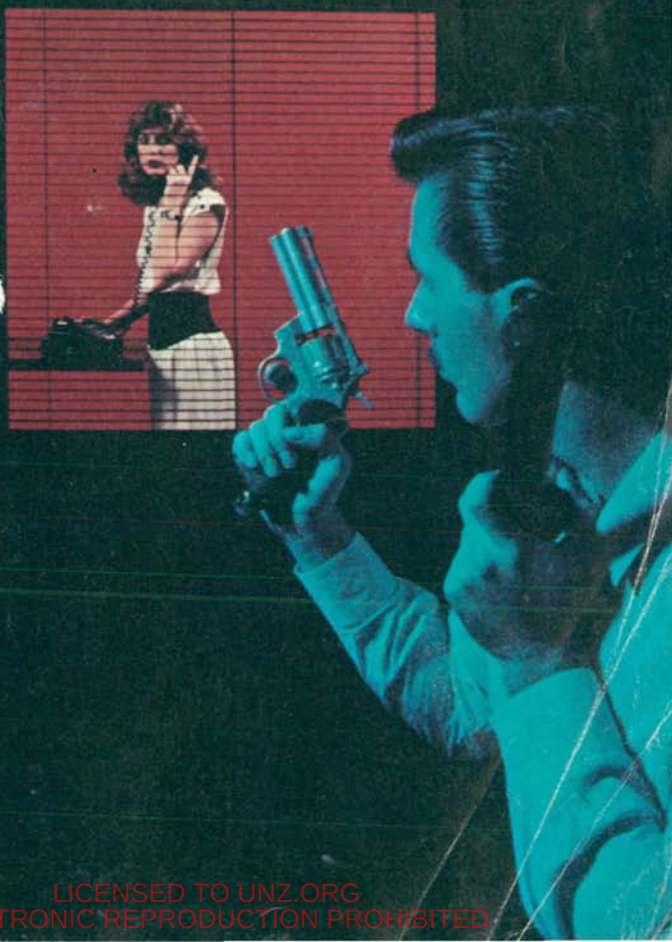

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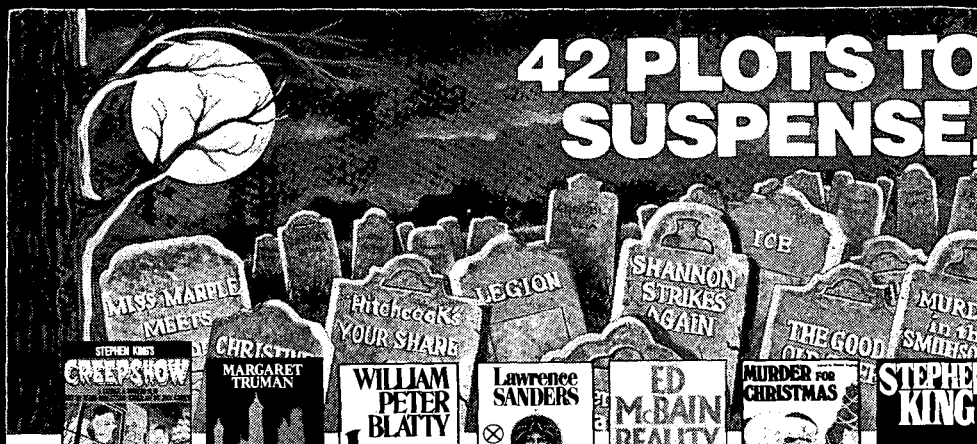

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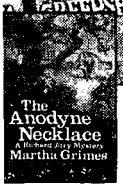

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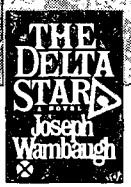

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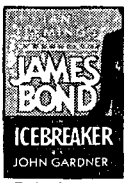

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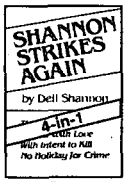

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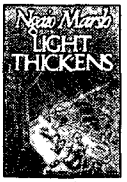

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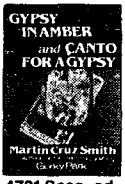

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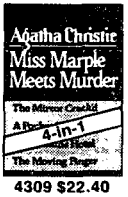

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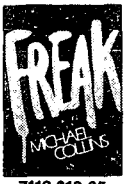

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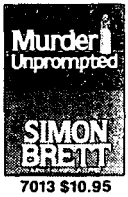

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

A woman was standing by the tall, diamond-paned, mullioned window, holding something blue and sparkling up to the light. She was strangely dressed in a long skirt, her hair falling loosely down her back, and she stood so still, gazing at the blue object with both arms raised, that for a moment Pringle had an uneasy feeling she wasn't a woman at all but the ghost of a woman. Then she turned round and smiled. "Hallo," she said. "Are you one of our campers . . . ?"

FEN HALL

by RUTH RENDELL

When children paint a picture of a tree they always do the trunk brown. But trees seldom have brown trunks. Birches are silver, beeches pewter color, planes grey and yellow, walnuts black, and the bark of oaks, chestnuts, and sycamores green with lichen. Pringle had never noticed any of this until he came to Fen Hall. After that, once his eyes had been opened and he had seen what things were really like he would have painted trees with bark in different colors, but next term he stopped doing art. It was just as well—he had never been very good at it and perhaps by then he wouldn't have felt like painting trees anyway. Or even looking at them much.

Mr. Liddon met them at the station in an old Volvo estate car. They were loaded down with camping gear, the tent and sleeping bags and cooking pots, and a calor gas burner in case it was too windy to keep a fire going. It had been very windy lately, the summer cool and sunless. Mr. Liddon was Pringle's father's friend and Pringle had met him once before, years ago when he was a little kid, but

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still it was up to him to introduce the others. He spoke with wary politeness.

"This is John and this is Roger. They're brothers."

Pringle didn't say anything about Roger always being called Hodge. He sensed that Mr. Liddon wouldn't call him Hodge any more than he would call *him* Pringle. He was right.

"Parents well, are they, Peregrine?"

Pringle said yes. He could see a gleam in John's eye that augured teasing to come. Hodge, who was always thinking of his stomach, said:

"Could we stop on the way, Mr. Liddon, and buy some food?"

Mr. Liddon cast up his eyes. Pringle could tell he was going to be "one of those" grownups. They all got into the car with their stuff, and a mile or so out of town Mr. Liddon stopped at a self-service shop. He didn't go inside with them, which was just as well. He would only have called what they bought junk food.

Fen Hall turned out to be about seven miles away. They went through a village called Fedgford, and a little way beyond it turned down a lane that passed through a wood.

"That's where you'll have your camp," Mr. Liddon said.

Of necessity, because the lane was no more than a rough track, he was driving slowly. He pointed in among the trees. The wood had a mysterious look as if full of secrets. In the aisles between the trees the light was greenish-gold and misty. There was a muted twittering of birds and a cooing of doves. Pringle began to feel excited. It was nicer than he had expected. A little farther on, the wood petered out into a plantation of tall straight trees with green trunks growing in rows, the ground between them all overgrown with a spiky plant that had a curious prehistoric look to it.

"Those trees are poplars," Mr. Liddon said. You could tell he was a schoolteacher. "They're grown as a crop."

This was a novel idea to Pringle. "What sort of a crop?"

"Twenty-five years after they're planted, they're cut down and used for making matchsticks. If they don't fall down first. We had a couple go over in the gales last winter."

Pringle wasn't listening. He had seen the house. It was like a house in a dream, he thought, though he didn't quite know what he meant by that. Houses he saw in actual dreams were much like his own home or John and Hodge's, suburban Surrey semi-detached. This house, when all the trees were left behind and no twig or leaf or festoon of wild clematis obscured it, stood basking in the sunshine

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with the confidence of something alive, as if secure in its own perfection. Dark mulberry color, of small Tudor bricks, it had a roof of many irregular planes and gables and a cluster of chimneys like candles. The windows with the sun on them were plates of gold between the mullions. Under the eaves swallows had built their lumpy, sagging nests.

"Leave your stuff in the car. I'll be taking you back up to the wood in ten minutes. Just thought you'd like to get your bearings, see where everything is first. There's the outside tap over there, which you'll use of course. And you'll find a shovel and an axe in there which I rely on you to replace."

It was going to be the biggest house Pringle had ever set foot in—not counting places like Hampton Court and Woburn. Fen Hall. It looked and the name sounded like a house in a book, not real at all. The front door was of oak, studded with iron and set back under a porch that was dark and carved with roses. Mr. Liddon took them in the back way. He took them into a kitchen that was exactly Pringle's idea of the lowest sort of slum.

He was shocked. At first he couldn't see much because it had been bright outside, but he could smell something dank and frowsty. When his vision adjusted, he found they were in a huge room or cavern with two small windows and about four hundred square feet of squalor between them. Islanded were a small white electric oven and a small white fridge. The floor was of brick, very uneven, the walls of irregular green-painted, peeling plaster with a bubbly kind of growth coming through it. Stacks of dirty dishes filled a stone sink of the kind his mother had bought at a sale and made a cactus garden in. The whole place was grossly untidy, with piles of washing lying about. John and Hodge, having taken it all in, were standing there with blank faces and shifting eyes.

Mr. Liddon's manner had changed slightly. He no longer kept up the hectoring tone. While explaining to them that this was where they must come if they needed anything, to the back door, he began a kind of ineffectual tidying up, cramming things into the old wooden cupboards, sweeping crumbs off the table and dropping them into the sink. John said:

"Is it all right for us to have a fire?"

"So long as you're careful. Not if the wind gets up again. I don't have to tell you where the wood is, you'll find it lying about." Mr. Liddon opened a door and called, "Flora!"

A stone-flagged passage could be seen beyond. No one came. Prin-

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gle knew Mr. Liddon had a wife, though no children. His parents had told him only that Mr. and Mrs. Liddon had bought a marvelous house in the country a year before and he and a couple of his friends could go and camp in the grounds if they wanted to. Further information he had picked up when they didn't know he was listening. Tony Liddon hadn't had two halfpennies to rub together until his aunt died and left him a bit of money. It couldn't have been much surely. Anyway, he had spent it all on Fen Hall—he had always wanted an old place like that. The upkeep was going to be a drain on him and goodness knows how he would manage.

Pringle hadn't been much interested in all this. Now it came back to him. Mr. Liddon and his father had been at university together, but Mr. Liddon hadn't had a wife then. Pringle had never met the wife and nor had his parents. Anyway, it was clear they were not to wait for her. They got back into the car and went to find a suitable camping site.

It was a relief when Mr. Liddon went away and left them to it. The obvious place to camp was on the high ground in a clearing and to make their fire in a hollow Mr. Liddon said was probably a disused gravel pit. The sun was low, making long shafts of light that pierced the groves of birch and crabapple. Mistletoe hung in the oak trees like green birds' nests. It was warm and murmurous with flies. John was adept at putting up the tent and gave them orders.

"Peregrine," he said. "Like a sort of mad bird."

Hodge capered about, his thumbs in his ears and his hands flapping. "Tweet, tweet, mad bird. His master chains him up like a dog. Tweet, tweet, birdie!"

"I'd rather be a hunting falcon than Roger the lodger, the sod," said Pringle and he shoved Hodge and they both fell over and rolled about grappling on the ground until John kicked them and told them to stop it and give a hand, he couldn't do the lot on his own.

It was good in the camp that night, not windy but still and mild after the bad summer they'd had. They made a fire and cooked tomato soup and fish fingers and ate a whole packet of the biscuits called iced bears. They were in their bags in the tent, John reading the *Observer's Book of Common Insects;* Pringle a thriller set in a Japanese prison camp his parents would have taken away if they'd known about it, and Hodge listening to his radio, when Mr. Liddon came up with a torch to check on them.

"Just to see if you're okay. Everything shipshape and Bristol fashion?"

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Pringle thought that an odd thing to say considering the mess in his own house. Mr. Liddon made a fuss about the candles they had lit and they promised to put them out, though of course they didn't. It was very silent in the night up there in the wood, the deepest silence Pringle had ever known, a quiet that was somehow heavy, as if a great dark beast had lain down on the wood and quelled every sound beneath under its dense soft fur. He didn't think of this for very long because he was asleep two minutes after they blew the candles out.

Next morning the weather wasn't so nice. It was dull and cool for August. John saw a Brimstone butterfly, which pleased him because the species was getting rarer. They all walked into Fedgford and bought sausages, and then found they hadn't a frying pan. Pringle went down to the house on his own to see if he could borrow one.

Unlike most men, Mr. Liddon would be at home because of the school holidays. Pringle expected to see him working in the garden, which even he could see was a mess. But he wasn't anywhere about. Pringle banged on the back door with his fist—there was neither bell nor knocker—but no one came. The door wasn't locked. He wondered if it would be all right to go in and then he went in.

The mess in the kitchen was rather worse. A large white and tabby cat was on the table eating something it probably shouldn't have been eating out of a paper bag. Pringle had a curious feeling that it would somehow be quite permissible for him to go on into the house. Something told him—though it was not a something based on observation or even guesswork—that Mr. Liddon wasn't in. He went into the passage he had seen the day before through the open door. This led into a large stone-flagged hall. The place was dark with heavy dark beams going up the walls and across the ceilings and it was cold. It smelled of damp. The smell was like mushrooms that have been left in a paper bag at the back of the fridge and forgotten. Pringle pushed open a likely looking door, some instinct making him give a warning cough.

The room was enormous, its ceiling all carved beams and cobwebs. Even Pringle could see that the few small bits of furniture in it would have been more suitable for the living room of a bungalow. A woman was standing by the tall, diamond-paned, mullioned window, holding something blue and sparkling up to the light. She was strangely dressed in a long skirt, her hair falling loosely down her back, and she stood so still, gazing at the blue object with both arms

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raised, that for a moment Pringle had an uneasy feeling she wasn't a woman at all but the ghost of a woman. Then she turned round and smiled.

"Hallo," she said. "Are you one of our campers?"

She was at least as old as Mr. Liddon, but her hair hung down like one of the girls' at school. Her face was pale and not pretty, yet when she smiled it was a wonderful face. Pringle registered that, staring at her. It was a face of radiant, kind sensitivity, though it was to be some years before he could express what he had felt in those terms.

"I'm Pringle," he said, and because he sensed that she would understand, "I'm called Peregrine really, but I get people to call me Pringle."

"I don't blame you. I'd do the same in your place." She had a quiet, unaffected voice. "I'm Flora Liddon. You call me Flora."

He didn't think he could do that and knew he would end up calling her nothing. "I came to see if I could borrow a frying pan."

"Of course you can." She added, "If I can find one." She held the thing in her hand out to him and he saw it was a small glass bottle. "Do you think it's pretty?"

He looked at it doubtfully. It was just a bottle. On the window sill behind her were more bottles, mostly of clear colorless glass but among them dark-green ones with fluted sides.

"There are wonderful things to be found here. You can dig and find rubbish heaps that go back to Elizabethan times. And there was a Roman settlement down by the river. Would you like to see a Roman coin?"

It was black, misshapen, lumpy, with an ugly man's head on it. She showed him a jar of thick bubbly green glass and said it was the best piece of glass she'd found to date. They went out to the kitchen. Finding a frying pan wasn't easy but talking to her was. By the time she had washed up a pan which she had found full of congealed fat, he had told her all about the camp and their walk to Fedgford and what the butcher had said:

"I hope you're going to wash yourselves before you cook my nice clean sausages."

And she told him what a lot needed doing to the house and grounds and how they'd have to do it all themselves because they hadn't much money. She wasn't any good at painting or sewing or gardening or even housework, come to that. Pottering about and looking

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at things was what she liked. " 'What is this life, if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?' "

He knew where that came from. W. H. Davies, the Super-tramp. They had done it at school.

"I'd have been a good tramp," she said. "It would have suited me."

The smile radiated her plain face.

They cooked the sausages for lunch and went on an insect-hunting expedition with John. The dragonflies he had promised them down by the river were not to be seen but he found what he said was a caddis, though it looked like a bit of twig to Pringle. Hodge ate five Mars bars during the course of the afternoon. They came upon the white and tabby cat with a mouse in its jaws. Undeterred by an audience, it bit the mouse in two and the tiny heart rolled out. Hodge said faintly, "I think I'm going to be sick," and was. They still resolved to have a cat-watch on the morrow and see how many mice it caught in a day.

By that time the weather was better. The sun didn't shine but it had got warmer again. They found the cat in the poplar plantation, stalking something among the prehistoric weeds John said were called horse tails. The poplars had trunks almost as green as grass, and their leafy tops, very high up there in the pale-blue sky, made rustling, whispering sounds in the breeze. That was when Pringle noticed about tree trunks not being brown. The trunks of the Scotch pines were a clear pinkish-red, as bright as flowers when for a moment the sun shone. He pointed this out to the others but they didn't seem interested.

"You sound like our auntie," said Hodge. "She does flower arrangements for the church."

"And throws up when she sees a bit of blood, I expect," said Pringle. "It runs in your family."

Hodge lunged at him, and he tripped Hodge up and they rolled about wrestling among the horse tails. By four in the afternoon, the cat had caught six mice. Flora came out and told them the cat's name was Tabby, which obscurely pleased Pringle. If she had said Snowflake or Persephone or some other daft name people called animals he would have felt differently about her, though he couldn't possibly have said why. He wouldn't have liked her so much.

A man turned up in a Land Rover as they were making their way back to camp. He said he had been to the house and knocked but no one seemed to be at home. Would they give Mr. or Mrs. Liddon a

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message from him? His name was Porter, Michael Porter, and he was an archaeologist in an amateur sort of way—Mr. Liddon knew all about it—and they were digging in the lower meadow and they'd come on a dump of Nineteenth Century stuff. He was going to dig deeper, uncover the next layer, so if Mrs. Liddon was interested in the top now was her chance to have a look.

"Can we as well?" said Pringle.

Porter said they were welcome. No one would be working there next day. He had just heard the weather forecast on his car radio and gale-force winds were promised. Was that their camp up there? Make sure the tent was well anchored down, he said, and he drove off up the lane.

Pringle checked the tent. It seemed firm enough. They got into it and fastened the flap, but they were afraid to light the candles and had John's storm lantern on instead. The wood was silent no longer. The wind made loud sirenlike howls and a rushing, rending sound like canvas being torn. When that happened, the tent flapped and bellied like a sail on a ship at sea. Sometimes the wind stopped altogether and there were a few seconds of silence and calm. Then it came back with a rush and a roar. John was reading Frohawk's *Complete Book of British Butterflies,* Pringle the Japanese prison-camp thriller, and Hodge was trying to listen to his radio. But it wasn't much use, and after a while they put the lantern out and lay in the dark.

About five minutes afterwards there came the strongest gust of wind so far, one of the canvas-tearing gusts but ten times fiercer than the last; and then, from the south of them, down towards the house, a tremendous rending crash.

John said, "I think we'll have to do something." His voice was brisk, but it wasn't quite steady and Pringle knew he was as scared as they were. "We'll have to get out of here."

Pringle put the lantern on again. It was just ten.

"The tent's going to lift off," said Hodge.

Crawling out of his sleeping bag, Pringle was wondering what they ought to do—if it would be all right, or awful, to go down to the house—when the tent flap was pulled open and Mr. Liddon put his head in. He looked cross.

"Come on, the lot of you. You can't stay here. Bring your sleeping bags and we'll find you somewhere in the house for the night."

A note in his voice made it sound as if the storm were their fault.

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Pringle found his shoes, stuck his feet into them, and rolled up his sleeping bag. John carried the lantern. Mr. Liddon shone his own torch to light their way. In the wood there was shelter but none in the lane and the wind buffeted them as they walked. It was all noise, you couldn't see much, but as they passed the plantation Mr. Liddon swung the light up and Pringle saw what had made the crash. One of the poplars had gone over and was lying on its side with its roots in the air.

For some reason—perhaps because it was just about on this spot that they had met Michael Porter—John remembered the message. Mr. Liddon said okay and thanks. They went into the house through the back door. A tile blew off the roof and crashed onto the path just as the door closed behind them.

There were beds up in the bedrooms but without blankets or sheets on them, and the mattresses were damp. Pringle thought them spooky bedrooms, dirty and draped with spiders' webs, and he wasn't sorry they weren't going to sleep there. There was the same smell of old mushrooms, and a smell of paint as well where Mr. Liddon had started work on a ceiling.

At the end of the passage, looking out of a window, Flora stood in a nightgown with a shawl over it. Pringle, who sometimes read ghost stories, saw her as the Grey Lady of Fen Hall. She was in the dark, the better to see the forked lightning that had begun to leap on the horizon beyond the river.

"I love to watch a storm," she said, turning and smiling at them.

Mr. Liddon had snapped a light on. "Where are these boys to sleep?"

It was as if it didn't concern her. She wasn't unkind but she wasn't involved, either. "Oh, in the drawing room, I should think."

"We have seven bedrooms."

Flora said no more. A long roll of thunder shook the house. Mr. Liddon took them downstairs and through the drawing room into a sort of study, where they helped him make up beds of cushions on the floor. The wind howled round the house and Pringle heard another tile go. He lay in the dark, listening to the storm. The others were asleep, he could tell by their steady breathing. Inside the bag it was quite warm and he felt snug and safe. After a while, he heard Mr. Liddon and Flora quarrelling on the other side of the door.

Pringle's parents quarrelled a lot and he hated it—it was the worst thing in the world, though less bad now than when he was younger. He could only just hear Mr. Liddon and Flora and only disjointed

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words, abusive and angry on the man's part, indifferent, amused on the woman's, until one sentence rang out clearly. Her voice was penetrating though it was so quiet:

"We want such different things!"

He wished they would stop. And suddenly they did, with the coming of the rain. The rain came, exploded rather, crashing at the windows and on the old sagging depleted roof. It was strange that a sound like that, a loud constant roar, could send you to sleep . . .

She was in the kitchen when he went out there in the morning. John and Hodge slept on, in spite of the bright watery sunshine that streamed through the dirty diamond window panes. A clean world outside, new-washed. Indoors the same chaos, the kitchen with the same smell of fungus and dirty dishcloths, though the windows were open. Flora sat at the table on which sprawled a welter of plates, indefinable garments, bits of bread and fruit rinds, an open can of cat food. She was drinking coffee and Tabby lay on her lap.

"There's plenty in the pot if you want some."

She was the first grownup in whose house he had stayed who didn't ask him how he had slept. Nor was she going to cook breakfast for him. She told him where the eggs were and bread and butter. Pringle remembered he still hadn't returned her frying pan, which might be the only one she had.

He made himself a pile of toast and found a jar of marmalade. The grass and the paths, he could see through an open window, were littered with broken bits of twig and leaf. A cock pheasant strutted across the shaggy lawn.

"Did the storm damage a lot of things?" he asked.

"I don't know. Tony got up early to look. There may be more poplars down."

Pringle ate his toast. The cat had begun to purr in an irregular throbbing way. Her hand kneaded its ears and neck. She spoke, but not perhaps to Pringle or the cat, or for them if they cared to hear.

"So many people are like that. The whole of life is a preparation for life, not living."

Pringle didn't know what to say. He said nothing. She got up and walked away, still carrying the cat, and then after a while he heard music coming faintly from a distant part of the house.

There were two poplars down in the plantation and each had left a crater four or five feet deep. As they went up the lane to check on their camp, Pringle and John and Hodge had a good look at them,

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their green trunks laid low, their tangled roots in the air. Apart from everything having got a bit blown about up at the camp and the stuff they had left out soaked through, there was no real damage done. The wood itself had afforded protection to their tent.

It seemed a good time to return the frying pan. After that they would have to walk to Fedgford for more food—unless one of the Liddons offered a lift. It was with an eye to this, Pringle had to admit, that he was taking the pan back.

But Mr. Liddon, never one to waste time, was already at work in the plantation. He had lugged a chain saw up there and was preparing to cut up the poplars where they lay. When he saw them in the lane he came over.

"How did you sleep?"

Pringle said, "Okay, thanks," but Hodge, who had been very resentful about not being given a hot drink or something to eat, muttered that he had been too hungry to sleep. Mr. Liddon took no notice. He seemed jumpy and nervous. He said to Pringle that if they were going to the house would they tell Mrs. Liddon—he never called her Flora to them—that there was what looked like a dump of Victorian glass in the crater where the bigger poplar had stood.

"They must have planted the trees over the top without knowing."

Pringle looked into the crater and sure enough he could see bits of colored glass and a bottleneck and a jug or tankard handle protruding from the tumbled soil. He left the others there, fascinated by the chain saw, and went to take the frying pan back. Flora was in the drawing room, playing records of tinkly piano music. She jumped up, quite excited, when he told her about the bottle dump.

They walked back to the plantation together, Tabby following, walking a little way behind them like a dog. Pringle knew he hadn't a hope of getting that lift now. Mr. Liddon had already got the crown of the big poplar sawn off. In the short time since the storm, its pale silvery-green leaves had begun to wither. John asked if they could have a go with the chain saw but Mr. Liddon said not so likely, did they think he was crazy? And if they wanted to get to the butcher before the shop closed for lunch they had better get going now.

Flora, her long skirt hitched up, had clambered down into the crater. If she had stood up in it, her head and shoulders, perhaps all of her from the waist up, would have come above its rim, for poplars have shallow roots. But she didn't stand up. She squatted down, using her trowel, extracting small glass objects from the leafmold. The chain saw whined, slicing through the top of the poplar trunk.

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Pringle, watching with the others, had a feeling something was wrong about the way Mr. Liddon was doing it. He didn't know what, though. He could only think of a funny film he had once seen in which a man, sitting on a branch, sawed away at the bit between him and the tree trunk, necessarily falling off himself when the branch fell. But Mr. Liddon wasn't sitting on anything. He was just sawing up a fallen tree from the crown to the bole. The saw sliced through again, making four short logs now as well as the bole.

"Cut along now, you boys," he said. "You don't want to waste the day mooning about here."

Flora looked up and winked at Pringle. It wasn't unkind, just conspiratorial, and she smiled, too, holding up a small glowing red glass bottle for him to see. He and John and Hodge moved slowly off, reluctantly, dawdling because the walk ahead would be boring and long. Through the horse tails, up the bank, looking back when the saw whined again.

But Pringle wasn't actually looking when it happened. None of them was. They had had their final look and had begun to trudge up the lane. The sound made them turn, a kind of swishing lurch and then a heavy plopping, sickening, dull crash. They cried out, all three of them, but no one else did, not Flora or Mr. Liddon. Neither of them made a sound.

Mr. Liddon was standing with his arms held out, his mouth open, and his eyes staring. The pile of logs lay beside him, but the tree trunk was gone, sprung-back roots and all, when the last saw cut went through, tipped the balance, and made its base heavier than its top. Pringle put his hand over his mouth and held it there. Hodge, who was nothing more than a fat baby really, had begun to cry. Fearfully, slowly, they converged, all four of them, on the now upright tree under whose roots she lay.

The police came, and a farmer and his son and some men from round about. Between them they got the tree over on its side again, but by then Flora was dead. Perhaps she died as soon as the bole and the mass of roots hit her. Pringle wasn't there to see. Mr. Liddon had put the plantation out of bounds and said they were to stay in camp until someone came to drive them to the station. It was Michael Porter who turned up in the late afternoon and checked they'd got everything packed up and the camp site tidied. He told them Flora was dead. They got to the station in his Land Rover in time to catch the 5:15 for London.

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On the way to the station he didn't mention the bottle dump he had told them about. Pringle wondered if Mr. Liddon had ever said anything to Flora about it. All the way home in the train he kept thinking of something odd. The first time he went up the lane to the camp that morning he was sure there hadn't been any glass in the tree crater. He would have seen the gleam of it and he hadn't. He didn't say anything to John and Hodge, though. What would have been the point?

Three years afterwards, Pringle's parents got an invitation to Mr. Liddon's wedding. He was marrying the daughter of a wealthy local builder and the reception was to be at Fen Hall, the house in the wood. Pringle didn't go, being too old now to tag about after his parents. He had gone off trees, anyway.

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a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"I hope Jose Lago enjoys a long and happy life in America," Nick told Roger North.

"I hope so, too," the ambassador said. "There are just a few routine matters to be resolved before he can be reunited with his wife."

They had started walking toward the front door when North noticed the smoke already drifting into the hallway. "You've got a fire!" Nick shouted . . .

THE THEFT OF THE BALL OF TWINE

by *EDWARD D. HOCH*

"I want you to steal a ball of twine," the man told Nick Velvet. His name was Dan Christie and he looked for all the world like the bearded captain of some Nineteenth Century whaler. The fact that Nick was meeting him at New York's South Street Seaport, in the shadow of a four-masted schooner on exhibit there, only heightened the illusion.

"That should be easy enough," Nick said. "Where is it?"

"In the home of Roger North, the former ambassador to Brazil. Maybe you've heard of him."

"I don't think so." Nick watched a seagull swooping lazily overhead. "You know, I steal only valueless objects. This ball of twine, are there diamonds knotted into it?"

"No, it has no value. It's just a used ball of twine that's been unwound and then rolled up again. Of course, there may be others in the ambassador's house."

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"How will I know the right one?"

"It will be one he's locked away. You won't find it in the kitchen drawer or behind the cellar stairs."

"So it does have some value."

Christie shrugged. "Of a nebulous sort. That needn't concern you."

"Where's the house?"

"It's a large white colonial on ten acres of land at the south end of Staten Island. Here's the address. The house has an alarm system, and there are uniformed guards on duty."

"How soon do you need it?"

"Forty-eight hours?"

"All right," Nick agreed. He accepted the envelope with half of his fee. "Give me a phone number where you can be reached."

That afternoon Nick told Gloria about his assignment.

"Do you need me this time?" she asked. Their relationship of more than seventeen years had been interrupted that summer when Gloria had left him for a man named Phil. She'd come back to Nick, but the wounds hadn't fully healed on either side. He found himself being unusually careful not to offend her, and Gloria for her part seemed withdrawn and a bit distant.

"I always need you," he told her now. "It would help me to find out everything you can about Roger North, the former ambassador to Brazil. Here's his address on Staten Island."

It didn't take long. She returned from the library a few hours later with a full report. "I thought I remembered the name, Nicky. He was in the news about a month ago when he helped get a man out of Brazil who was wanted by the police. They claimed he was a thief, but North knew him when he was the ambassador and said his crimes were political. There's no extradition treaty with Brazil, so they can't get him back."

"What's his name?"

"Jose Lago, a poet. He's pretty much vanished since he arrived in New York with Roger North. Some people thought he was staying at North's home, but there's been no sign of him there."

"I wonder what a ball of twine could have to do with it," Nick wondered.

"*The News* had a picture of him arriving at Kennedy Airport. He was carrying a box wrapped with a string and some wag wondered if it was the loot from his robberies."

"I doubt if any such loot would have passed through Customs."

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Gloria consulted her notes. "At that time his wife Maria was still in Brazil, living in the Sao Paulo area. Lago expressed the wish that she'd soon be free, too."

"Why is there such a secret about where he's living?"

"Apparently there are some factions back home who'd assassinate him if they can't get him back."

"Do you have anything about Ambassador North? Do you know who lives at the house with him?"

"Normally, his wife and daughter, but according to the newspapers they're traveling in Europe right now."

"You're a marvel, Gloria," Nick said.

He spent the evening drawing up a suitable plan of action, and the following morning he telephoned Roger North with a request for an appointment, representing himself as a photo-journalist planning a trip to photograph recent industrial growth along the Amazon River. North was reluctant at first, but finally agreed.

"I can give you thirty minutes after lunch today. But no more—I have a busy schedule."

As Dan Christie had warned, the former ambassador's home on Staten Island was well guarded. A uniformed security man met Nick at the door and escorted him to North's first-floor office. Nick had glimpsed another patrolling the grounds of the house as he drove up.

"I hope it's only a temporary measure," Roger North explained after Nick had introduced himself and commented on the guards. "We've had some trouble with groups coming out here to protest one thing or another. It upset my wife and daughter a great deal. They're in France at present and I hope things quiet down before they return."

"I read about the Jose Lago affair."

North nodded. "He has his followers, and his enemies. The people who come to demonstrate are Brazilian and Portuguese for the most part, and the security service can furnish only Spanish-speaking guards. The languages are similar but not identical—Portuguese is the more difficult—and I'm often called out of the house to mediate some misunderstanding caused by the language problem." He sighed and shook his head. "I never realized retirement could bring so many problems with it."

He led the way through the bright, airy house to a room whose large windows overlooked a formal rose garden. At its center Nick

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could see a sundial. "Very nice," he murmured, noting that there was a door leading directly from the room to the garden.

"My wife handles the garden. She's quite good at it."

"I want to thank you for giving me this time."

"I'm sorry it can't be longer, Mr.—Velluto, is it?"

Nick nodded. "As I told you on the phone, I'm planning a journey up the Amazon to photograph the new industrial areas there."

"A sad development, in many ways. The jungle is being destroyed at a rate I would have thought impossible a decade ago. Lago spoke out against it while he was still down there."

"So he was a political figure to some extent."

"Oh, yes. That business of his being a thief was just government propaganda."

They went on to discuss Nick's supposed journey, and North got out a large map of the country to point out some of the Amazon areas. Finally, after twenty-five minutes, Nick looked at his watch. "I should be on my way. May I use your bathroom first?"

"Certainly," North said. "There's one just down the hall to the left."

Nick followed his directions, stepped inside, shut the door, washed his hands leisurely, then removed a slim, tubular smoke bomb from his inside pocket. He pulled the safety catch and dropped it into the waste basket knowing he had thirty seconds before it discharged.

Returning to the room at the back of the house, he thanked the ambassador again for his courtesy. "I hope Jose Lago enjoys a long and happy life in America," he said.

"I hope so, too. There are just a few routine matters to be resolved before he can be reunited with his wife."

They had started walking toward the front door when North noticed the smoke already drifting into the hallway. "You've got a fire!" Nick shouted.

North gasped and called for the security guards, then abandoned Nick and hurried to a book-lined study. The smoke was thickening fast. Nick followed him inside and watched while he gathered up his appointment book from the desk and some bound journals from a bookcase. "Can I help you with anything?" Nick asked. One of the security guards ran past the door and North, who hadn't heard Nick, hurried to a file cabinet in a corner of the room. From the bottom drawer, he extracted a small round object he placed with the other items, returning to the cabinet in search of something else.

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Moving swiftly, Nick crossed the room, grabbed it up, and hurried to the back of the house and out the door to the garden.

There was no one between him and a stand of trees several hundred feet away. He circled around through the trees, reached the road, and waited until the arrival of two fire engines further distracted North and the guards. Then he ran to where he'd parked his car a bit down the road from the house and headed home.

Nick unwound the string on the living-room floor. "There's nothing inside it, nothing attached to it," he said, bewildered.

"And he's paying you twenty-five-thousand dollars for that?" Gloria still couldn't believe what he was paid that sum to steal.

"I never question my clients."

"Maybe it would be better if you did question them more, Nicky."

He pondered. "It's probably not this Christie's after. It's probably the string that was tied around the package Lago brought with him from Brazil." He wound the twine back into a ball and dialed the number Dan Christie had given him. "Nick Velvet," he announced. "I can make delivery this evening."

"Good." Christie gave Nick an address in lower Manhattan. "Can you be here in an hour?"

"I'm in Westchester. It'll depend on the traffic."

"All right," Christie said. "As soon as you can get here. I'll be waiting."

Nick made it with a few minutes to spare. Parking a block away from the address on East Houston Street, he walked to the building, climbed to the third floor, and rang the bell. Christie opened the door and admitted him to a spacious converted loft.

"You're right on time, Velvet."

Nick took the ball of twine from a plastic bag and placed it on a table.

"Are you sure it's the one I want?"

"Aren't you sure?"

"Not really," Dan Christie admitted. "I only had a brief glimpse of it."

"I set off a smoke bomb and this is what he went for when he thought the house was on fire."

The bearded man nodded. "Clever! I guess that's good enough for me. Here's the rest of your money."

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Nick counted it quickly and placed it in an inside pocket. "What did Jose Lago bring with him from Brazil?"

Christie smiled slightly. "You know about that, do you?"

"I did a little research," Nick admitted.

"If you must know, it was an award—a bronze statue of the Muses—presented to him for his writing. He wouldn't leave Brazil without it. But Lago needn't concern you. I hired you only to steal this string."

"But it's connected with Lago, isn't it?"

"I repeat—that doesn't concern you." Christie's voice had taken on a hard edge.

"I'm just curious," Nick said. "This string is too weak to have tied someone up, and too long to have tied that package Lago brought with him. Yet it had been unwound and used for something." As he spoke, it suddenly came to him that there was another thing that could make the string so valuable. He picked it up. "As I said, it's not very strong, but it *is* long. It probably measures the length of something—or more likely, the distance from one point to another."

Dan Christie paced across the room to the windows, then turned to face Nick.

"You might be able to help me a little more, Velvet, if you'd like to earn some extra cash."

"Keep talking."

"I was watching North's house a week ago, late at night, and I saw him in the yard with one of the security guards. The guard was carrying a shovel and North was rewinding this ball of string. One end of it had been tied to the sundial in the rose garden. I think he buried something on the grounds of his house and the length of this twine locates the hiding place of whatever it is."

Nick nodded. "That's why it was valuable enough for him to retrieve when he thought the house was on fire. But he's probably decided he can do without it. He must remember the burial spot pretty well—and of course the freshly turned earth would pinpoint the location for him."

"Why didn't I think of that?" Christie said wryly. "All right, I'm going out there tonight. I could use you to distract the guards. I'll pay you extra."

"It's really that important to you to find out what he buried?"

"It is."

"Why?"

"It could be a body . . ."

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They reached Roger North's house on Staten Island shortly before midnight. There was no sign of the outside guard as Christie parked the car off the road just beyond the limits of the ambassador's property. "Some security," he commented. "Come with me and bring the shovels."

"I don't steal anything of value," Nick reminded him.

"I'm not planning on stealing anything," Christie said. "I just want to see what's buried here. Lago hasn't been seen in weeks. Maybe the ambassador killed him."

"That's pretty far-fetched. Why would he kill him after bringing him to this country?"

Christie didn't respond and Nick found himself following him over the low wall that surrounded the property. The moon was half-hidden by clouds, but there was enough light for them to locate the rose garden.

"There's a light upstairs," Nick whispered. "The ambassador's probably getting ready for bed."

"Keep an eye out for the guard. He might have been around the other side of the house."

"He could slip up pretty close before we'd spot him in the dark."

"If we can't see him," Christie decided, "he can't see us." Quickly he looped one end of the string around the projecting gnomon of the sundial and tied it tightly. "Now all we have to figure is which direction to go."

"Let's try the obvious," Nick suggested. "After all, the man's name is North."

"Okay," Christie agreed readily. "But which way is north?"

"If the sundial was properly installed, twelve o'clock should point exactly to north. Let's try it."

They sighted out of the rose garden toward a distant shadowy tree and headed in that direction, playing out the string behind them. When they finally came to the end of it, they were about twenty feet from the tree in the center of the gently rolling lawn in back of the house.

"No sign of digging here," Christie said with disappointment.

"Don't be too sure. This sod has been taken up and carefully replaced."

They lifted the sod and started digging, working as quietly as possible. A shade tree sheltered them a bit from the house, but there was still a chance the patrolling guard might return to his outside post.

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Nick's shovel hit something about a foot down. "No body," he announced. "It's just a box."

Dan Christie nodded. "The one Lago brought with him." They brushed away the dirt and lifted the lid. By the moonlight they could see the bronze statue of the seven Muses dancing in a circle. Lago's name was engraved on the base.

"But why would North bury this?" Nick wondered. "Maybe Lago really is dead."

"More likely he's hiding in that house," Christie reasoned. "That would explain the need for guards. And North buried this in the back yard rather than have someone come across it inside and know that Lago was hiding there. If he wouldn't leave Brazil without it, he wouldn't be likely to leave Staten Island without it."

"That makes sense. What do we do with it now?"

Christie hesitated only an instant. "Bury it again. I've seen what I needed."

They'd just finished the task of filling in the hole and replacing the sod when a spotlight came on at the back of the house. An instant later, Nick saw North's head appear at an upstairs window. He opened it and called out to a guard, "*O qué aconteceu?* What's the matter?"

Dan Christie didn't wait for the guard's reply. "Come on!" he told Nick. "Drop the shovels and run for the trees!"

Just as they reached the shelter of a big oak, there was the sound of a shot and more yelling. Nick heard a branch snap above their heads as a second shot was fired. "Keep low!" he warned.

Then the shooting stopped and they circled around through the trees to the road. The guards may have spotted the car, but they had made no move toward it. Christie and Nick lay in the grass for twenty minutes before they decided it was safe to emerge. Then they scrambled for the car and sped off quickly down the road.

"Mind telling me what you're going to do now?" Nick asked.

Christie kept his eyes on the road. "Take you back to your car. What happens after that needn't concern you. I'm paid for jobs the same as you are. Let's just say we're both experts in our fields."

In the morning, Gloria could see Nick was troubled. "You were out half the night. What happened?"

"Nothing. I delivered the string and collected the rest of my fee."

"Then what are you so gloomy about?"

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"I think the man who hired me is a paid assassin."

"You've worked for criminals before," Gloria reminded him.

"I know it, and I will again. But I don't like being party to a murder."

"Maybe you're wrong."

"I doubt it. Dan Christie has a hunter's look. And this Brazilian chap, Jose Lago, made a good many enemies. They can't get him back there through extradition, but someone certainly could be paying Christie to kill him. Ambassador North must fear the same thing or he wouldn't have armed guards all over his place."

"Then this business with the string—"

"—was all part of Christie wanting to make certain Lago is hiding in North's house."

"Knowing where he is and getting a chance to kill him are two different things. If North has kept him under wraps until now, why would he suddenly bring him out in the open?"

"You told me Lago had a wife he hoped could join him here soon. He'd come out of hiding for such a reunion, and that would be the opportunity Christie needs."

"Well, it doesn't concern you, Nicky."

"I suppose not," he said absently.

For the next two days he did very little. Gloria would find him sitting on the back steps with a beer, gazing out at the trees. On the third morning she noticed a small item in the newspaper and called it to his attention.

He took the paper and read the headline: POET'S WIFE DUE HERE. The article reported that Maria Lago would be allowed to leave Brazil and was expected to fly to New York today. Nick put down the paper and got to his feet. "I have to do something," he said. "Christie will kill him. He may kill both of them. I can't be a part of it."

"You're not a part of it. Besides, you don't even know for sure that Lago is hiding in North's house."

"I know," Nick said. "I'll see you later."

The house on Staten Island was alive with press reporters and television crews when Nick arrived. It was obvious the reunion between Lago and his wife would be taking place soon. As Nick left his car and moved to join the crowd, he knew North was not likely to welcome him with open arms—he'd be remembered from the smoke-bomb incident and possibly he'd been recognized in the yard

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the other night as well. He was still debating how to make his approach when a black limousine pulled up and the ambassador got out, holding the door open for a handsome Latin woman in her forties who smiled at the reporters clustering around.

A security guard stepped forward to take her arm while Roger North hovered on the other side of her, keeping back the press. That was when Nick spotted Dan Christie in the crowd, carrying a portable video camera on his shoulder and pointing it at Maria Lago.

"Christie!" Nick shouted, and the eye of the camera swung in his direction. North shoved Mrs. Lago aside and there was a sudden shot that seemed to come from the wrong direction. Before Nick could move, he saw blood spreading on Dan Christie's face as he started to topple over, loosening his grip on the camera as he fell.

It was one of the guards who had fired, and before Nick realized what was happening another had him inside the house. North followed quickly with Mrs. Lago as reporters and police clustered around the body.

North helped Mrs. Lago to a chair. "You always seem to turn up here at times of disaster, Mr. Velluto," he said, glaring at Nick.

"I was trying to prevent a disaster. That man came here to kill Jose Lago. You'll probably find a weapon of some sort concealed in that video camera he was carrying."

"No doubt," North said. "And you came here with him."

"I came here to stop it."

A police officer entered the room to announce that Christie was dead. And that there had been a gun inside the camera. "I think you'll want to hold this man, too," North told the officer, gesturing toward Nick.

"Wait a minute! I had no part in this. If you'll listen to me I can prove it."

Roger North frowned. "Start talking."

"Christie came here today thinking Lago would come out of hiding to be reunited with his wife. But suppose Lago was never really in hiding? Suppose I knew where Christie could have found him any time at all?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know very well, Mr. North. Jose Lago hasn't been hiding in your house. He's been standing outside all these weeks guarding it—hidden from the public in the most obvious way imaginable."

North said something in Portuguese and the guard who'd shot

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Christie smiled and removed his uniform cap. He went to Maria Lago and they embraced.

"You're right, of course," North admitted. "I had him shave off his moustache and put on a uniform and nobody recognized him. Nobody, that is, except you. How did you know?"

"If he'd been hiding in your house, my smoke bomb the other day would have brought him out in the open. So he wasn't here. Yet I happen to know that trophy for his writing is buried out back. That indicated he was still here. How could he be here and not here at the same time? Christie told me he had seen a security guard with you, carrying a shovel. And I remembered you called out to the guards the other night in Portuguese and English—*'O qué aconteceu?* What's the matter?' I'm not good in languages but I know 'What's the matter?' is *'Qué pasa?'* in Spanish, and you told me the first day I came here that none of your guards understood Portuguese, only Spanish. That's when I decided one of the guards had to be Jose Lago, the Portuguese-speaking poet from Brazil. If I'd told Christie, he could have shot him at any time rather than waiting until today."

They were silent for a moment, and then Lago asked North something in his native language. North replied quickly, and Lago spoke again.

"He believes you," North told Nick. "He knew Christie had come to kill him when he heard you shout his name."

"Is it all right for me to go, then?" Nick asked.

"The police will want a statement. They'll want to know your connection with Christie."

"Certainly. It was completely innocent." Nick was already forming his story, figuring how long it would take before he'd be on his way home.

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EUDORA WELTY

Mississippian Eudora Welty has received the National Medal for Literature, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Howells Medal, the National Institute of Arts and Letters Gold Medal for the Novel, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom—as well as honorary degrees from Harvard, Yale, the University of the South, the University of North Carolina, and Washington University.

Her One Writer's Beginnings *(Harvard University Press) has recently climbed onto the bestseller lists. In the section titled "Learning To See," she writes of her childhood summer trips to Ohio and West Virginia with her parents to visit their families: "The trips were wholes unto themselves. They were stories . . . When I did begin to write, the short story was the shape that had already formed itself and stood waiting in the back of my mind." In the section titled "Finding a Voice": "During the writing of any single story, there is no other existing. Each writer must find out for himself, I imagine, on what strange basis he lives with his own stories."*

The University Press of Mississippi's Conversations with Eudora Welty, *edited by Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, quotes her on the subject of Robert Penn Warren's influence on her career: "He helped me from the time he first accepted my stories. He and Cleanth Brooks and Albert Erskine all were at* The Southern Review *. . . and it was to them I sent my first stories."*

Warren and Brooks began publishing The Southern Review *in 1935. Although its circulation was never large, the magazine was of such quality that T. S. Eliot's* Criterion *in London called it the best literary periodical of all the American publications. "Old Mr. Marblehall" first appeared in the Spring 1938 issue under the title "Old Mr. Granada." Wearing either name, the old man is an unforgettable being from the remarkable imagination of one of America's great authors . . .*

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OLD MR. MARBLEHALL

by EUDORA WELTY

Old Mr. Marblehall never did anything, never got married until he was sixty. You can see him out taking a walk. Watch and you'll see how preciously old people come to think they are made—the way they walk, like conspirators, bent over a little, filled with protection. They stand long on the corners but more impatiently than anyone, as if they expect traffic to take notice of them, rear up the horses and throw on the brakes, so they can go where they want to go. That's Mr. Marblehall. He has short white bangs, and a bit of snapdragon in his lapel. He walks with a big polished stick, a present. That's what people think of him. Everybody says to his face, "So well preserved!" Behind his back they say cheerfully, "One foot in the grave." He has on his thick, beautiful, glowing coat—tweed, but he looks as gratified as an animal in its own tingling fur. You see, even in summer he wears it, because he is cold all the time. He looks quaintly secretive and prepared for anything, out walking very luxuriously on Catherine Street.

His wife, back at home in the parlor standing up to think, is a large, elongated old woman with electric-looking hair and curly lips. She has spent her life trying to escape from the parlor-like jaws of self-consciousness. Her late marriage has set in upon her nerves like a retriever nosing and puffing through old dead leaves out in the woods. When she walks around the room she looks remote and nebulous, out on the fringe of habitation, and rather as if she must have been cruelly trained—otherwise she couldn't do actual, immediate things, like answering the telephone or putting on a hat. But she has gone further than you'd think: into club work.

Surrounded by other more suitably exclaiming women, she belongs to the Daughters of the American Revolution and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, attending teas. Her long, disquieted figure towering in the candlelight of other women's houses looks like something accidental. Any occasion, and she dresses her hair like a unicorn horn. She even sings, and is requested to sing. She even writes some of the songs she sings ("O Trees in the Evening").

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She has a voice that dizzies other ladies like an organ note, and amuses men like a halloo down the well. It's full of a hollow wind and echo, winding out through the wavery hope of her mouth.

Do people know of her perpetual amazement? Back in safety she wonders, her untidy head trembles in the domestic dark. She remembers how everyone in Natchez will suddenly grow quiet around her. Old Mrs. Marblehall, Mr. Marblehall's wife: she even goes out in the rain, which Southern women despise above everything, in big neat biscuit-colored galoshes, for which she "ordered off." She is only looking around—servile, undelighted, sleepy, expensive, tortured Mrs. Marblehall, pinning her mind with a pin to her husband's diet. She wants to tempt him, she tells him. What would he like best, that he can have?

There is Mr. Marblehall's ancestral home. It's not so wonderfully large—it has only four columns—but you always look toward it, the way you always glance into tunnels and see nothing. The river is after it now, and the little back garden has assuredly crumbled away, but the box maze is there on the edge like a trap, to confound the Mississippi River. Deep in the red wall waits the front door—it weighs such a lot, it is perfectly solid, all one piece, black mahogany . . . And you see—one of *them* is always going in it. There is a knocker shaped like a gasping fish on the door. You have every reason in the world to imagine the inside is dark, with old things about. There's many a big, deathly-looking tapestry, wrinkling and thin, many a sofa shaped like an S. Brocades as tall as the wicked queens in Italian tales stand gathered before the windows. Everything is draped and hooded and shaded, of course, unaffectionate but close. Such rosy lamps! The only sound would be a breath against the prisms, a stirring of the chandelier. It's like old eyelids, the house with one of its shutters, in careful working order, slowly opening outward. Then the little son softly comes and stares out like a kitten, with button nose and pointed ears and little fuzz of silky hair running along the top of his head.

The son is the worst of all. Mr. and Mrs. Marblehall had a child! When both of them were terribly old, they had this little, amazing, fascinating son. You can see how people are taken aback, how they jerk and throw up their hands every time they so much as think about it. At least, Mr. Marblehall sees them. He thinks Natchez people do nothing themselves, and really, most of them have done or could do the same thing. This son is six years old now. Close up, he has a monkey look, a very penetrating look. He has very sparse

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Japanese hair, tiny little pearly teeth, long little wilted fingers. Every day he is slowly and expensively dressed and taken to the Catholic school. He looks quietly and maliciously absurd, out walking with old Mr. Marblehall or old Mrs. Marblehall, placing his small booted foot on a little green worm, while they stop and wait on him. Everybody passing by thinks that he looks quite as if he thinks his parents had him just to show they could. You see, it becomes complicated, full of vindictiveness.

But now, as Mr. Marblehall walks as briskly as possible toward the river where there is sun, you have to merge him back into his proper blur, into the little party-giving town he lives in. Why look twice at him? There has been an old Mr. Marblehall in Natchez ever since the first one arrived back in 1818—with a theatrical presentation of Otway's *Venice,* ending with *A Laughable Combat between Two Blind Fiddlers*—an actor! Mr. Marblehall isn't so important. His name is on the list, he is forgiven, but nobody gives a hoot about any old Mr. Marblehall. He could die, for all they care; some people even say, "Oh, is he still alive?"

Mr. Marblehall walks and walks, and now and then he is driven in his ancient fringed carriage with the candle burners like empty eyes in front. And yes, he is supposed to travel for his health. But why consider his absence? There isn't any other place besides Natchez, and even if there were, it would hardly be likely to change Mr. Marblehall if it were brought up against him. Big fingers could pick him up off the Esplanade and take him through the air, his old legs still measuredly walking in a dangle, and set him down where he could continue that same old Natchez stroll of his in the East or the West or Kingdom Come. What difference could anything make now about old Mr. Marblehall—so late? A week or two would go by in Natchez and then there would be Mr. Marblehall, walking down Catherine Street again, still exactly in the same degree alive and old.

People naturally get bored. They say, "Well, he waited till he was sixty years old to marry, and what did he want to marry for?" as though what he did were the excuse for their boredom and their lack of concern. Even the thought of his having a stroke right in front of one of the Pilgrimage houses during Pilgrimage Week makes them only sigh, as if to say it's nobody's fault but his own if he wants to be so insultingly and precariously well preserved. He ought to have a little black boy to follow around after him. Oh, his precious old health, which never had reason to be so inspiring! Mr. Marblehall

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has a formal, reproachful look as he stands on the corners arranging himself to go out into the traffic to cross the streets. It's as if he's thinking of shaking his stick and saying, "Well, look! I've done it, don't you see?" But really, nobody pays much attention to his look. He is just like other people to them. He could have easily danced with a troupe of angels in Paradise every night, and they wouldn't have guessed. Nobody is likely to find out that he is leading a double life.

The funny thing is he just recently began to lead this double life. He waited until he was sixty years old. Isn't he crazy? Before that, he'd never done anything. He didn't know what to do. Everything was for all the world like his first party. He stood about, and looked in his father's books, and long ago he went to France, but he didn't like it.

Drive out any of these streets in and under the hills and you find yourself lost. You see those scores of little galleried houses nearly alike. See the yellowing China trees at the eaves, the round flower beds in the front yards, like bites in the grass, listen to the screen doors whining, the ice wagons dragging by, the twittering noises of children. Nobody ever looks to see who is living in a house like that. These people come out themselves and sprinkle the hose over the street at this time of day to settle the dust, and after they sit on the porch, they go back into the house, and you hear the radio for the next two hours. It seems to mourn and cry for them. They go to bed early.

Well, old Mr. Marblehall can easily be seen standing beside a row of zinnias growing down the walk in front of that little house, bending over, easy, easy, so as not to strain anything, to stare at the flowers. Of course he planted them! They are covered with brown—each petal is a little heart-shaped pocket of dust. They don't have any smell, you know. It's twilight, all amplified with locusts screaming; nobody could see anything. Just what Mr. Marblehall is bending over the zinnias for is a mystery, any way you look at it. But there he is, quite visible, alive and old, leading his double life.

There's his other wife, standing on the night-stained porch by a potted fern, screaming things to a neighbor. This wife is really worse than the other one. She is more solid, fatter, shorter, and while not so ugly, funnier-looking. She looks like funny furniture—an unornamented stair-post in one of these little houses, with her small monotonous round stupid head—or sometimes like a woodcut of a Bavarian witch, forefinger pointing, with scratches in the air all

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around her. But she's so static she scarcely moves, from her thick shoulders down past her cylindered brown dress to her short, stubby house-slippers. She stands still and screams to the neighbors.

This wife thinks Mr. Marblehall's name is Mr. Bird. She says, "I declare I told Mr. Bird to go to bed, and look at him! I don't understand him!" All her devotion is combustible and goes up in despair. This wife tells everything she knows. Later, after she tells the neighbors, she will tell Mr. Marblehall. Cymbal-breasted, she fills the house with wifely complaints. She calls, "After I get Mr. Bird to bed, what does he do then? He lies there stretched out with his clothes on and don't have one word to say. Know what he does?"

And she goes on, while her husband bends over the zinnias, to tell what Mr. Marblehall (or Mr. Bird) does in bed. She does tell the truth. He reads *Terror Tales* and *Astonishing Stories*. She can't see anything to them: they scare her to death. These stories are about horrible and fantastic things happening to nude women and scientists. In one of them, when the characters open bureau drawers, they find a woman's leg with a stocking and garter on. Mrs. Bird had to shut the magazine. "The glutinous shadows," these stories say, "the red-eyed, muttering old crone," "the moonlight on her thigh," "an ancient cult of sun worshippers," "an altar suspiciously stained . . ." Mr. Marblehall doesn't feel as terrified as all that, but he reads on and on. He is killing time. It is richness without taste, like some holiday food. The clock gets a fruity bursting tick, to get through midnight—then leisurely, leisurely on. When time is passing it's like a bug in his ear. And then Mr. Bird—he doesn't even want a shade on the light, this wife moans respectably. He reads under a bulb. She can tell you how he goes straight through a stack of magazines. "He might just as well not have a family," she always ends, unjustly, and rolls back into the house as if she had been on a little wheel all this time.

But the worst of them all is the other little boy. Another little boy just like the first one. He wanders around the bungalow full of tiny little schemes and jokes. He has lost his front tooth, and in this way he looks slightly different from Mr. Marblehall's other little boy—more shocking. Otherwise, you couldn't tell them apart if you wanted to. They both have that look of cunning little jugglers, violently small under some spotlight beam, preoccupied and silent, amusing themselves. Both of the children will go into sudden fits and tantrums that frighten their mothers and Mr. Marblehall to death. Then they can get anything they want. But this little boy, the one who's lost

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the tooth, is the smarter. For a long time he supposed that his mother was totally solid, down to her thick separated ankles. But when she stands there on the porch screaming to the neighbors, she reminds him of those flares that charm him so, that they leave burning in the street at night—the dark solid ball, then, tongue-like, the wicked, yellow, continuous, enslaving blaze on the stem. He knows what his father thinks.

Perhaps one day, while Mr. Marblehall is standing there gently bent over the zinnias, this little boy is going to write on a fence, "Papa leads a double life." He finds out things you wouldn't find out. He is a monkey.

You see, one night he is going to follow Mr. Marblehall (or Mr. Bird) out of the house. Mr. Marblehall has said as usual that he is leaving for one of his health trips. He is one of those correct old gentlemen who are still going to the wells and drinking the waters—exactly like his father, the late old Mr. Marblehall. But why does he leave on foot? This will occur to the little boy.

So he will follow his father. He will follow him all the way across town. He will see the shining river come winding around. He will see the house where Mr. Marblehall turns in at the wrought-iron gate. He will see a big speechless woman come out and lead him in by the heavy door. He will not miss those rosy lamps beyond the many-folded draperies at the windows. He will run around the fountains and around the Japonica trees, past the stone figure of the pigtailed courtier mounted on the goat, down to the back of the house. From there he can look far up at the strange upstairs rooms. In one window the other wife will be standing like a giant, in a long-sleeved gathered nightgown, coming her electric hair and breaking it off each time in the comb. From the next window the other little boy will look out secretly into the night, and see him—or not see him. That would be an interesting thing, a moment of strange telepathies. (Mr. Marblehall can imagine it.) Then in the corner room there will suddenly be turned on the bright, naked light. Aha! Father!

Mr. Marblehall's little boy will easily climb a tree there and peep through the window. There, under a stark shadeless bulb, on a great fourposter with carved griffins, will be Mr. Marblehall, reading *Terror Tales*, stretched out and motionless.

Then everything will come out.

At first, nobody will believe it.

Or maybe the policeman will say, "Stop! How dare you!"

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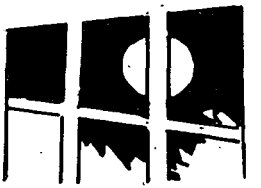
Maybe, better than that, Mr. Marblehall himself will confess his duplicity—how he has led two totally different lives, with completely different families, two sons instead of one. What an astonishing, unbelievable, electrifying confession that would be, and how his two wives would topple over, how his sons would cringe! To say nothing of most men aged sixty-six. So thinks self-consoling Mr. Marblehall.

You will think, what if nothing ever happens? What if there is no climax, even to this amazing life? Suppose old Mr. Marblehall simply remains alive, getting older by the minute, shuttling, still secretly, back and forth?

Nobody cares. Not an inhabitant of Natchez, Mississippi, cares if he is deceived by old Mr. Marblehall. Neither does anyone care that Mr. Marblehall has finally caught on, he thinks, to what people are supposed to do. This is it: they endure something inwardly—for a time secretly; they establish a past, thus they store up life. He has done this; most remarkably, he has even multiplied his life by deception; and plunging deeper and deeper, he speculates upon some glorious finish, a great explosion of revelations . . . the future.

But he still has to kill time, and get through the clocking nights. Otherwise he dreams that he is a great blazing butterfly stitching up a net; which doesn't make sense.

Old Mr. Marblehall! He may have years ahead yet in which to wake up bolt upright in the bed under the naked bulb, his heart thumping, his old eyes watering and wild, imagining that if people knew about his double life, they'd die.



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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Earlier in this issue, Ruth Rendell introduced you to the appealing young Pringle (given name Peregrine). Now meet Keith Harper, another very special boy. They're not all snips and snails and puppy-dog tails. Or, more positively, thank heaven for little boys . . .

BAYTOWN'S LOSS

by WILLIAM BANKIER

The sound of car doors slamming in the night brought nine-year-old Keith Harper out of bed and to the window. A policeman was helping his father up the front walk, a limp arm held by the wrist across his shoulder, the old man's legs, half bent, contributing one dragging step to the officer's three.

Keith went to the head of the stairs and stood listening. He was wearing only his pajama bottom. The night air tingled on his moist skin. He could smell the musty odors of the old house. With a hand laid against his cheek, the other gripping the worn bannister rail, he listened.

"I went into the hotel for cigarettes," the policeman said. "Jimmy was behind the desk but he wasn't making sense. I could tell he'd been drinking."

"It was good of you to bring him home, Sergeant Logie."

"Don't you worry about a thing, Denise." The policeman's voice was calm—he sounded like a friend. This terrible thing had happened and he wasn't bothered at all. "I put your husband in the car and rang up young Telford, the day clerk. He was there in twenty minutes. I told him Jimmy was taken sick. No need for anybody to know anything different."

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Keith's father was making animal noises behind the conversation. When the policeman left the house and drove away, his mother came back from the front door. "Can you get upstairs?" A questioning pause. "Could you drink some black coffee?" Her control gave way and she slid to the verge of crying. If once she started, Keith knew, she wouldn't stop for a long time. "Jimmy, why do you do this?"

In response, Keith's father erupted with a few slurred, belligerent syllables. The boy crept out of the stairwell and tiptoed back to bed. The sheet and pillowcase felt clammy under him as he lay down on creaking springs. He turned the pillow over, lowered his head onto the cooler surface, and closed his eyes. One of his favorite ways of getting to sleep was to imagine that a gypsy woman was telling his fortune. They sat across from each other at the kitchen table. Speaking with an accent, she said, "This is your lifeline, very long . . ." She traced the line by drawing a fingertip across his palm and the sensation flickered through Keith's middle like a mild electric shock.

He must have slept because when his mother came to wake him up, he had been dreaming. It was war. Cannon fire slammed like huge doors closing on empty rooms. Soldiers stood in trenches, their heads flung back, mouths gaping as they roared with incoherent rage. One by one they fell. It was Keith Harper's duty to catch them; but he couldn't support their weight and the bodies collapsed and sank in mud deep as his knees.

"Keith, wake up . . ."

He raised himself on an elbow. There was greyish light in the room. His mother was fully dressed. "What time is it?"

"Half past five. But we have to go—we're catching a bus." Sometimes his mother's French-Canadian accent returned and embellished her speech with quaintly inaccurate emphases.

"What bus?" Keith was not aware of any trip by bus. It was mid-July and the school holidays were on—he had nothing to do in the weeks ahead except fill the long days with games and rides and horseshoes and spontaneous mischief at the East Hill playgrounds.

"We're going to Montreal. My sister isn't well, she needs me." Denise Harper fed her son this information in a rush. It was strange to see her out of her dressing-gown this early in the day. Nor was she wearing the faded housedress that was her uniform. This morning she was dressed in the grey suit and white blouse she used to wear years ago when she was willing to go downtown. "Put on your

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good suit for the trip," she said. "There's a clean shirt on your chair. I'll pack your things while you have breakfast."

Keith ate a bowl of corn flakes alone at the kitchen table. He stared through the window between the hollyhocks at an uneven row of sparrows sitting on the back fence waiting for the bread-crumbs which usually came in a burst from that doorway. There was lots of light now in a sky which was blue and white. Keith got up and opened the kitchen window. The birds scattered. He threw out some crumbs onto the patchy grass and soon they were back. He was kneeling behind the open window watching them feed when his mother struggled down the stairs carrying two suitcases. "It's so early," Keith said, screwing up his face as if he had been presented with an indecipherable problem.

"I don't want us to miss the bus." His mother was busy this morning, checking the contents of her purse, locking the back door, inspecting her face in the dining-room mirror, taking a couple of books from the shelf beside the china cabinet, putting apples and oranges in a paper bag. He had never seen such a display of energy from her. Usually she sat at the front window holding her dressing gown closed at the neck with a white-knuckled fist, smoking a cigarette. She looked and acted younger this morning—a different woman.

"Are you ready? We have to leave."

Keith said he had to go to the bathroom again. On the upstairs landing, he stood outside his parents' bedroom, staring at the closed door. "Where's Dad?" he called out, loud enough to wake most people.

"He's asleep. Be quiet. Hurry, we have to go."

The walk from the house to Front Street was downhill most of the way, which was a good thing because the suitcases were heavy. Keith kept shifting his from one hand to the other, twice in each block. It was a strange sight to see his mother out on the street like this, dressed the same as the women who taught at Keith's school. For the last couple of years, she had hardly ventured out at all. It had something to do with a Home-and-School meeting where Jimmy Harper had appeared late and drunk. He must have said or done something embarrassing because Denise Harper said to him in a cold, small voice when they got home where Keith was practicing his handwriting at the dining-room table, "It's the last time you make a fool of me in public."

His father was in the kitchen, slamming cupboard doors. "Is there nothing to drink around here?" He turned to leave the kitchen as

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his wife was coming in. He pushed her aside roughly and the back of her head thudded against the door frame.

She said, with her eyes closed, "Keith, go upstairs to bed."

He didn't argue. He fled, without looking at either of them.

In the morning, his mother had a dark bruise on her cheek. That was the beginning of her staying inside the house, of her remaining in night attire like an invalid, and it marked the introduction of the shapeless housedress, the uniform of the char.

Now here she was, striding across the deserted campus of Baytown High School, turned out so smartly that most of Keith's anxiety evaporated, dispelled by pride in his mother's appearance.

They had fifteen minutes to wait for the bus, which would come rolling down Front Street and stop outside the Paragon Café. Inside, Keith drank a glass of orange juice while his mother sipped coffee. It was strange and pleasing to see the lipstick smear on the rim of the cup.

She went to the bathroom and when she came back, her dark hair was drawn up neatly and she smelled of perfume.

The bus arrived on time. There was something about its dark green color and long, boxlike appearance that filled Keith with excitement bordering on fear. The only other vehicle that had this effect upon him was the truck that had come down Albert Street one spring day, spreading tar. It was a squat, round affair with a row of spigots on a bar at the back. It moved slowly, the hot, black, aromatic spray turning the road into a gleaming river.

"Here's the bus," his mother said, getting to her feet. "Let's not miss it."

Only one other passenger was boarding the bus, a neatly dressed man who stood aside to let the woman and her young son climb up the steps ahead of him. Keith saw in his mind's eye the door of his parents' bedroom. His father was sleeping behind that closed door. When he woke up in the empty house, how would he get his supper? His father had never done anything for himself as far as Keith could remember.

The trip from Baytown to Montreal used up most of the day, with three rest-stops along the way. It was after the first stop at Kingston that Keith remembered the kitchen window he had left open. If it should rain while his father was asleep and a lot of water blew in, there would be hell to pay. Well, there was nothing he could do about it now.

"Are you all right?" his mother asked. "You look funny."

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"I'm okay."

"You aren't going to be sick?"

"No, I feel fine." And it was true. Sitting manfully in the outside seat beside his mother, Keith was experiencing satisfaction he had never known before. It was as if he had made a new friend and together they were embarking on an adventure.

The center of Montreal was like street after street of downtown Baytown. Keith had never seen so many stores and restaurants. The streetcars fascinated him, each with a pole slanting up from the roof and a little wheel on the end, snapping electric sparks against the overhead wires.

When they had climbed down at the bus station and claimed their baggage, Keith's mother said she had to get in touch with her sister. She went to a row of telephones while Keith sat on one of the suitcases, the other one between his knees.

He watched her putting money into the telephone slot, dialing, listening, talking rapidly in what he knew must be French. Soon she replaced the receiver and came back to him.

"Well, that's that. My sister is better—she has gone back to work. And I'm afraid she has no room for us, a friend has moved in. So—first job for us is to find a room."

She bought a newspaper, turned to the classified ads, and scanned columns of small type. Mrs. Harper knew the regions of Montreal, could reject addresses too far from "centre-ville." She made more telephone calls, this time with her son by her side.

They were in luck. Riding in a taxi to a massive red-brick building on Lincoln Avenue, they discovered a neat little apartment that satisfied her and for which she paid two weeks' rent in advance.

Keith inspected the tiny rooms after the landlady went away and while his mother unpacked the suitcases. It was one-tenth the size of the house in Baytown—the bathroom was a closet, the kitchenette merely a crowded area in the short hall connecting bedroom and living room—but he felt delighted. There seemed to be safety in this living space where he could see every corner of it at once and where nobody could hide.

That night, Keith slept in the bedroom, his mother unfolding the sofa in the living room and making it up into a second bed. "I'm smaller than you are," he said. "You should sleep in here."

"This is the way I want it," she insisted. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she folded the sheet neatly down over the blanket and tucked

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it up under his chin. Her eyes were like dark pools of some glistening liquid. "Do you miss home?" she asked him.

"No, this is great." He freed a hand from the covers and interlaced his fingers with hers. "Don't worry about me."

In the morning they went out to a restaurant for breakfast because there wasn't yet any food in the apartment. Keith felt uneasy having orange juice, cereal, toast, and hot chocolate while his mother drank only a cup of coffee but she said it was all she wanted. She said nothing while he ate, holding her cup in both hands, staring across it with narrowed eyes through the restaurant window into the busy street. At last she said,

"Keith, you may as well know we're not going back to Baytown."

He knew she was having difficulty—he wanted to help her. "I understand," he said.

"Your father and I had an argument. —Well, we had lots of arguments."

"I know."

"We decided it would be better for us not to be together. So he is staying at home and we will make a new life here in Montreal. Okay?" Her tone brightened and she smiled. The worst had been said and now she spoke more quickly. "Montreal is a great city. People have lots of fun in Montreal. In the winter, we can go to the Forum and see the Canadiens play hockey, okay?"

"I'd like that." For years, Keith had never missed a Saturday-night hockey broadcast on the radio. His collection of bubble-gum cards was in his bedside drawer back home—abandoned because he hadn't realized he was leaving home forever. Perhaps his mother could ask his father sometime to send them along to him. Most of the pictures on the cards were of Toronto Maple Leaf players—Turk Broda, Syl Apps, Red Horner—but he and his friends had to admit some of the Canadiens were good, too.

"Another thing," his mother went on. The trapped expression was in her eyes again—this was something else difficult to say. "Now that I'll be working in Montreal, I intend to go back to my original name. Desrosiers. Okay? So if anybody asks for Denise Desrosiers, you'll know they mean me."

It was not as disturbing to Keith as she seemed to think it was. The exotic, foreign name was in keeping with her new appearance as a young, vigorous woman. "That's all right," he said.

When the waitress brought the bill, Denise Desrosiers gave the

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girl a quick glance, assessing her style. She was in her late teens—bad complexion, a sullen expression on her face. At the cash register, a stout middle-aged man with a black moustache was frowning at a pile of wrinkled invoices. Mother and son left the booth and when they neared the counter, she told Keith, "Wait outside, I won't be a minute."

As he was closing the door behind him, Keith heard his mother say brightly, *"Puis-je vous parler, monsieur?"* He watched their conversation through the window. His mother did most of the talking, in an animated way, using her hands to emphasize what she was saying. The restaurant owner began to smile, then he laughed. At the end, he said a few words, looked at his watch, spoke again, then reached across the counter and shook hands with Keith's mother.

When she came outside, her tone of voice was triumphant. "There, I have a job! Waitress, cashier, bookkeeper—the whole thing. No travel expenses, I can walk to work. We'll have enough to pay the rent, buy food, and some left over. What do you think of your old mother?"

"You didn't waste any time," Keith said and they both laughed.

"Do you mind me waiting on tables?"

The idea bothered him, but he knew it would be wrong to say so. "You're cashier, too," he said. Then, as they went in search of a grocery store, Keith surrendered himself to all the strange smells and noises of the city that made it so different from Baytown.

The next three days were different from anything Keith had experienced. On waking up, he would lie in the now less-than-strange bed with his eyes half open, listening to cars racing past in the street, a distant door closing on an echoing hallway, murmuring voices on the other side of the wall. Once he heard a metallic ringing noise that reminded him of the giant-strides clanging in their chains against the central iron pole at the East Hill playgrounds—a lump rose in his throat and his eyes misted with tears of homesickness.

His mother worked afternoons and part of the evenings at the restaurant, so she and Keith spent the mornings together. The weather was fixed in a repetition of fine days, so they took sandwiches and went for walks, exploring the neighborhoods adjoining Lincoln Avenue. His favorite was the hike along Sherbrooke Street for quite some distance until they arrived at an acreage of well tended grass, with many huge trees providing shade and an ornate

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brick building enclosing most of one side of the field with a greenhouse attached to it, the sun reflecting from its glass roof.

"This is Westmount Park," Denise said, choosing an area of deep shade, setting out their lunch on a checkered cloth borrowed from the restaurant and opening a bottle of lemonade.

"You never ask about your father," she said, concentrating on finding whatever was hidden in the grass and making her uncomfortable. She discovered an acorn and threw it aside.

Keith was relieved to be away from home and the explosions of rage from his father, after which he would have to look for days at the changing colors of the bruise on his mother's face. He much preferred her in this active mood instead of her silent depression around the house in Baytown. But he couldn't bring himself to say this to her. "Have you heard from him?"

"No. And I don't expect to."

"Will we never see him again?"

"Never." She said it with her eyes wide open, staring at but not seeing the half eaten sandwich in her hand. Her distant mood turned Keith inward, too, and for a time they ate without speaking. Then she summoned him back from his reverie by singing, to the tune of "Silver Threads Among the Gold":

"Envoi-moi une carte-postale,
Avec ton portrait dessus . . ."

This musical request for him to send her a postcard with his picture on it never failed to make Keith laugh. She said, "Come on, finish eating. I want to show you the public library. It's in that big building. And we can walk through the greenhouse, too. You can come here when I'm at work, okay?"

Keith felt that sooner or later other parts of this city, regions he had only glimpsed from the bus on the journey in, would become areas for exploration. But now his mother wanted reassurance and he gave it to her. "I bet it's a better library than the one in Baytown."

A couple of weeks later, while they were eating breakfast, Sergeant Logie of the Baytown Police came to the apartment. When his mother answered the door, she seemed not all that surprised to see him. She paused for just a second, then said, "Yes, all right," and stood back to admit him as if this were a game and he had won.

When he saw the young boy at the table, the policeman hesitated, glanced from him to his mother, and raised his eyebrows.

"It's all right, he has nine years. And old for his age," she said.

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Logie decided to speak to Keith. "Are you old enough to hear some bad news?" He paused while the boy regarded him with expressionless eyes. Then he went on to say, "It's your father. I'm afraid he's dead."

Keith nodded but he could not think of anything to say. His mother came in, "How did it happen, Norman?" It surprised the boy to discover that his mother knew the policeman's name.

"I was hoping *you* could tell *me*." It was an ominous remark, but the officer did not sound unfriendly when he said it.

"I can't tell you a thing." She went to the table and began clearing away the breakfast dishes.

"You left town suddenly. Without telling anybody. A neighbor called us when the milk deliveries began piling up. Nobody had seen Jimmy for a few days. We had to break the lock on the front door." The policeman hesitated, glancing again at the boy.

"Go ahead," she said quietly. "We've got to know."

"We found his body in the bedroom. He'd been hit a few times about the head. With a lead doorstop—we found it on the floor."

"I had to come away in a hurry," Denise said. "My sister was sick."

He looked around the tiny apartment. "Is this her place?"

"She got better."

The policeman smiled faintly at that. "Good thing I know your maiden name, Denise. Otherwise I might not have been able to find you."

"How did you do it?"

"I knew you'd look for work. The unemployment office has records of all the new hirings." Watching the woman clean up the table, the policeman seemed to be admiring her, though his voice was heavy with authority. "It looks bad, you've got to admit that."

"I admit nothing."

"Your husband is killed, you vanish with your son. You should hear the talk back home."

"Let them talk."

"I'm the law, Denise. I need an answer. If not from you, from nobody."

Keith's mind had been absorbing the shock of his father's death and its implications. They were going to be taken back to Baytown. This sweet new life in Montreal, the tidy apartment with no anger in it, no danger, the exciting walks, his mother's young appearance—everything was to be thrown away as they were restored to

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the old regime. Worse, with his father dead, life in Baytown could never be the same.

"I know who killed my father," Keith said. His mind was racing. It was like the time he sneaked in through the side exit of the Bay Theater to see a Tom Mix movie and the usher caught him and he invented his excuse on the spot and got away with it—by believing his own words. He had come this way to find the toilet, had become confused, pushed open the wrong door, and found himself in the alleyway.

Now his mother warned him: "Keith!" and Sergeant Logie said, "Go ahead, son," and the boy raised his eyes and had no difficulty holding them steady as he told the officer, "Bruno did it."

"Bruno who?"

"I don't know, my father just called him Bruno. You never saw him, Mum. He came one time when you were out and he and Dad had a lot of drinks together. He said something about lake boats—I think he was a sailor. I was upstairs but I could hear them. When you came back and they heard you at the front door, Bruno let himself out through the kitchen window."

"I never heard of this," she said to the policeman.

"It was one of the times he was very drunk. When you came in, there was a big argument."

"Plenty of times like that," she said.

Logie was looking at Keith with a thoughtful expression on his face. "We found the kitchen window open," he said. "The man—this Bruno character—could have come to see your father sometime after you left. They drank, they argued, they fought, and he ended up delivering the fatal blows with the doorstop. Then, in order not to be seen leaving the house, he let himself out by the kitchen window and escaped across the back garden." The policeman released a long breath. "It's a theory."

"It's news to me," Denise said. "But if the boy says so . . ."

"I know father was alive when we left the house," Keith said. "He was in bed and I went in and said goodbye to him. He told me to be good, and to look after my mother."

Sergeant Logie said, "You're doing an excellent job of that, young Keith." He smiled at the woman standing as far out of the way as she could remove herself in the tiny room, one hand covering part of the pretty face. "That's obvious, I'd say."

All three of them went outside onto the street after Logie refused

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coffee, saying he had a long drive ahead of him and things to do back in Baytown.

"The statement I've just taken down which the lad has signed may be enough to leave us with a coroner's verdict of 'person or persons unknown.' That should do for the time being, while we institute a search for Mr. Bruno. It may be necessary sometime in the future to have you back for further questioning."

"You know where to find me, Norman," she said, and he smiled at her from behind the wheel of his car.

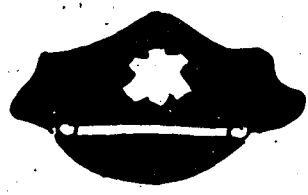
"Otherwise, you're set to stay in Montreal?"

"It was my first home," she said, "and Keith likes it here."

"I don't ever want to go back," Keith said.

"Then that's Baytown's loss," Logie said as he switched on the engine.

They watched the car drive away and turn a corner. Then they went inside, and while his mother began washing up the dishes and before there was anything for him to dry Keith went back to staring at the sports pages of the *Gazette* and in particular a photograph of a smiling baseball player under a bold headline: BRUNO DOES IT! Heroically and unexpectedly, this young man had pitched a no-hitter, thus keeping his team's hopes alive for a position in the playoffs of the Atwater League.



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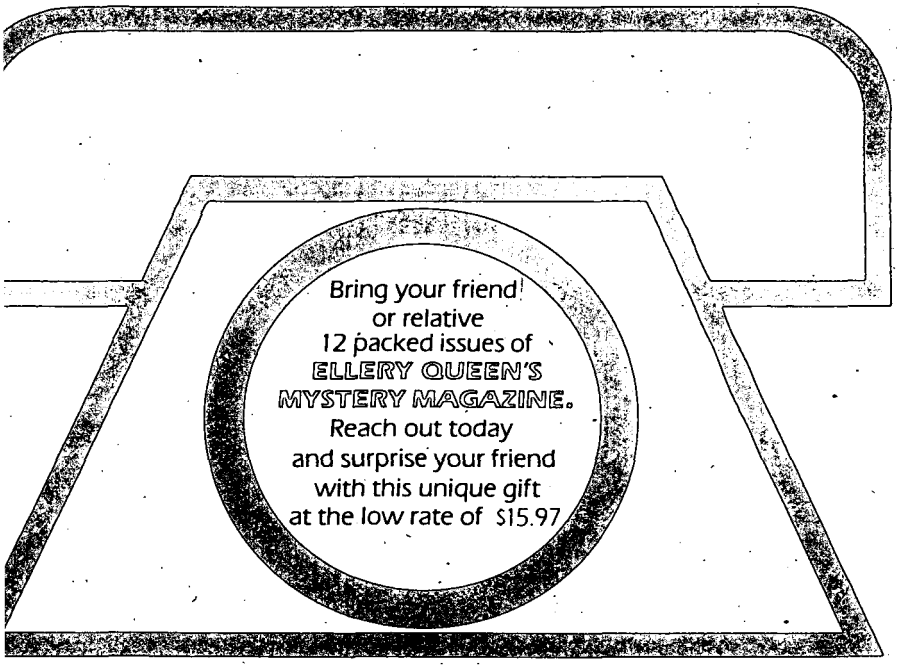

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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

"D'you know," Arnold Horrobin informed Don Tobin without preamble, "that I haven't bought a rubber band since 1981—February 1981?"

Your editor has a weakness for boring characters. Not in real life, of course—never—but in fiction and the movies. Who remembers Ralph Richardson in The Wrong Box, *for instance . . . ?*

THE ADVENTURE OF THE RUBBER BANDS

by JEFFRY SCOTT

The unlikeliest of friends, Don Tobin and Arnold Horrobin made even less likely detectives. Not that they were, by trade. Tobin runs a toyshop near London's Waterloo railway station while Arnold Horrobin is a Whitehall civil servant, shuffling obscure statistics for arcane purposes.

Yet they managed to solve the Bish murder.

Don Tobin grumbles, "What sort of name is Percy Bish for the victim of a crime of passion? Tisn't right, Arnie." Thus exorcising illogical qualms over helping to send a fellow human to prison—even a killer.

Without fail, Arnold Horrobin assumes a boiled expression, lips primly tight as his own badge-of-office umbrella, retorting, "I dare say that must be A Joke. Not in the best of taste, old man—with respect."

There you have them. Chalk and cheese, north and south, Holmes and Watson. Except that Watson hung on Holmes's words and Don Tobin found listening to Horrobin a penance.

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Tobin is fat—pounds overweight and slipshod with it. He has looked middle-aged since shortly after his twenty-first birthday, claiming that the subsequent hangover was the ruin of him. He's been known to turn out in odd socks, wear brown shoes with a blue suit—*not* done around the Home Counties—and commit plaid ties or plastic belts.

Whereas Arnold Horrobin, spindly and pin-neat, has never drunk anything stronger than well milked tea in his life. By rights, they ought not to have been on close terms.

It came about through living in the same road—Cherrytree Way, Pleasant Park, an archetypal tamed and stuffy Surrey suburb—and sharing the 8:30 A.M. train to town. What linked them was Tobin's compassion.

For he's a soft touch, despite his sullen morning air, bloodshot and pouched, not to say poached. And Horrobin, never suspecting it, is a thoroughly tedious person. Were boring to be made an Olympic event, Arnold Horrobin would be in Britain's squad with every prospect of Pulling Off the Big One and Going for Gold, as the sports hacks put it.

Some men cannot snub beggars nor kick stray dogs. Don Tobin could not turn his back on Arnold Horrobin. Their relationship had less of chalk and cheese than The Ancient Mariner and that wretched Wedding Guest in the poem.

Neither man realized it, but their joint investigation into Percy Bish's death began long before that event, Arnold Horrobin making the first discovery.

A raw and rainy day, even Nature seeming to weep at the relentless appearance of yet another Monday morning, but several commuters stampeded out of Pleasant Park station's cozy waiting room as Horrobin arrived. A choice between Arnold and a shower-bath on the platform was hardly a contest.

"D'you know," he informed Don Tobin without preamble, "that I haven't bought a rubber band since 1981—February 1981?"

It struck Tobin as a vintage conversation-stopper of a remark. Only it wouldn't stop Arnold, who could and often did conduct conversations all on his own.

"You must be wondering how that state of affairs comes about. Here I am, awash in rubber bands. Well, a touch of hyperbole there. But I do have this box of them. Not a little box, mind. As a matter of fact, it's a chocolates box, my anniversary gift to Muriel a few

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years ago, a regular cardboard casket. There must be several hundred elastic bands in there, though I haven't counted them recently."

Don Tobin thought that "recently" was pure Arnold Horrobin. He pictured the monster actually counting his hoard, gloating over its increase. It helped to explain poor Muriel Horrobin's unfortunate nervous tic, a semi-permanent wink, and her startling fits of shrill giggles.

"Rubber bands?" Tobin grated. "What the hell are you doing, saving up to build a trampoline?"

Arnold was offended. "No need for bad language, old man. They're not cheap, rubber bands, and they're bound to come in handy. In the long run."

"God help us," muttered his captive audience.

"I acquire at least a dozen every morning on the way here," Arnold Horrobin confided. "It's the postman, you see. They're given rubber bands for their work. To keep each addressee's letters together. But they shouldn't throw them away, like ours does. He strews them all the way down Cherrytree Way—or all the way up, according to your starting point."

Don Tobin said, "And you pick them up."

"Exactly! It's an ill wind and all that. But on the other hand, no wonder one needs a second mortgage for a book of stamps these days." Horrobin paused, and Tobin cut in hastily, "Yes, Arnie, I know you don't really mean it about a second mortgage." Tolerance and compassion have their limits. From bitter experience he knew that much more of this and he'd develop a maddening itch all along his spine but a fraction of an inch beneath skin level.

"Hardly a laughing matter," Arnold Horrobin agreed self-reproachfully. "Have you any idea how many postmen are employed in mainland Britain?"

"I'm sure you'll tell me, Arnie."

Arnold did worse, he proceeded to theorize about the finances of rubber-band profligacy, assuming that first five percent, then a quarter, and finally seventy percent of postmen failed to re-cycle their bands. It lasted from Pleasant Park to Clapham Junction.

Grinding his teeth, Tobin suggested: "You ought to take it up with Percy. Tell him to mend his ways." Percy Bish had been their postman for nearly three years. Nobody had told young Bish about postmen being cheery and courteous. He was a hulking, insolent fellow with a Presley quiff but his own unique obnoxiousness.

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Tobin happened to know that Arnold Horrobin and Percy Bish had clashed. Arnold lectured the postman about not kicking the front gate shut and Bish had warmly offered Arnold "a knuckle sandwich."

Some weeks later, driving to the station with his wife Elise, Don Tobin caught sight of Arnold harvesting on his way to the station. The Tobins lived at the last house in Cherrytree Way, where the playing fields began, and Horrobin's place was halfway down.

Arnold Horrobin was striding along, pausing every thirty yards or so to dip sideways, right hand pecking into the fringe of grass between sidewalk and roadway. Elise Tobin murmured, "What on earth's the lunatic doing, folk dancing?" She'd seen nothing like it since the Monty Python TV show's Ministry of Silly Walks classic.

"Oh, he's picking up rubber bands," her husband explained unguardedly.

Elise snapped, "I've had about enough of your silly sarcasm, Don."

That, for the time, was the end of the matter.

Except that later Don Tobin would recall why his wife had been so ill-tempered. She'd been suffering from a common malady among Pleasant Park matrons: a virulent bout of jealousy caused by a virus unknown to medical science but commonly called Mrs. Sharon Penny.

Sharon was many things. Mainly, too much. A sailor's dream, a centerfold goddess freed from the page.

Cherrytree Way had many cliques and sets, often overlapping. There were Mah-Jongg addicts visiting back and forth, a theater-going set, and so forth. One tribe gave parties around Christmas, wine (watery) and cheese (soapy if not brazenly Processed, on soggy crackers) lasting exactly three hours and over in time for lunch. Another school threw party-parties, Frank and Sharon Penny organizing the majority and attending all of them. Or at least, Sharon attended (though starred would be a better term), while colorless Frank tagged along or gladly acted as host-barman. A shy man, it saved him having to handle any but easy questions.

At one such soiree, Don Tobin very nearly made a fool of himself with Sharon. Elise Tobin didn't qualify that, dropping the "very nearly" part and substituting "the most dreadful, shaming, squalid" in front of "utter blasted idiot."

"She dragged me into that cloakroom to change a lightbulb," Don

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explained, for the better part of a month. "While brushing up your techniques in the Kiss of Life," Elise nodded, lethally sweet and understanding.

It was enough to make Don Tobin's blood run cold at the sight of Sharon Penny ever afterward—wiggle, hot eyes, bruised-looking mouth, and all. Sometimes Sharon would spot him heading for the station when he left the car at home. The Pennys lived at No. 10, quite near where it entered Station Avenue. When she made goldfish faces at him through the window and waved, Tobin winced and wished himself elsewhither.

It wasn't even flattering. Apart from loving Elise, Don Tobin had few illusions about himself. Sharon would have made a play for Robert Redford or the garbage man, from conditioned reflex.

Arnold Horrobin, by definition as it were, was excluded from the party-parties in Cherrytree Way. For that matter, only two neighbors had steeled themselves to attend the Christmas wine-and-cheese he gave one year.

Therefore, he knew nothing about Sharon Penny—while as far as Tobin was concerned, he knew too much. Ill-assorted they might be, but when it came to Percy Bish's murder they were complementary.

Percy Bish's violent death evoked varying reactions in Pleasant Park, mainly morbid excitement with patches of sheepish regret. Percy had rubbed a lot of people the wrong way—in England it's customary to tip the postman once a year, the Christmas Box tradition, and those shelling out less than two pounds to Percy had been punished with ripped and muddied letters or small packets clearly marked FRAGILE and HANDLE WITH CARE that crunched and rattled depressingly on arrival.

There'd been talk of complaining to the local postmaster, some kind of deputation or petition. But everyone who'd wished the lout ill or said they'd like to wring the beggar's neck felt awful when a person unknown did that very thing.

Bish's body was found on a Wednesday morning, less hidden than discarded, behind one of the massive cast-iron rollers in the playing fields at the end of Cherrytree Way.

He had two rounds, Cherrytree Way, ending at about 7 A.M., and another shorter route close to Pleasant Park post office. The routine was for him to return there for the second bag of mail. His supervisor sent out a search party around midday when Percy went missing.

The police soon established that he had completed his Cherrytree

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Way mail route. The Tobins and the people across the road got letters that morning and Bish's red Post Office-issue pushbike was propped against the lamppost outside the Tobin house, a yard from the gate to the sports area. That, and medical findings, suggested that the postman had been strangled to death between 6 A.M., when he left the sorting office, and perhaps 7 A.M.

Elise Tobin said, "I can't get over it. We could have seen it happen." And she shuddered.

"Not really," said Don Tobin. "It doesn't get light until half past seven these winter mornings. And you only get a view of the sports-ground from the bathroom. Standing on the bath, at that." He knew, because he cleaned the bathroom window, which was too high for Elise to reach.

"That only makes it worse," she brooded. "Fancy somebody pouncing on him in the dark—beastly! Mind you, if Fishy Bishy had killed somebody, been the attacker instead of the victim, I wouldn't be half as shocked."

"I beg your pardon?"

Elise pulled a face at him. "Don't get all stuffy. This may be horrible, but it's darned *interesting*."

"Granted," he conceded drily. "I meant the attacker versus victim bit, though."

"Oh, most of the girls had trouble with him," Elise explained airily. "The Passionate Postman. He was a local scandal, always leering and ogling and making off-color remarks if you came to the door while he was around."

"We never see the fellow—saw him," her husband objected.

"Not now, but he used to do the other half of his route first. Last year, Bish would be calling about half past eight when the husbands were en route to work. Grand opportunity for him, the pest."

It was news to Don Tobin. "You should have told me if he was worrying you, darling."

Elise laughed scornfully. "Give over, Don! He never dared, with me. He wasn't daft—he could tell I thought him greasy and grubby. But I expect he had the odd success here and there—like selling vacuum cleaners, knock at a hundred doors and you'll make one sale, they say."

The following morning at the station, Arnold Horrobin pounced on Tobin. "You had the police up at your end of the road last night." He had a flair for informing people of what they knew.

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"Door-to-door interviews," Tobin agreed. "Trying to find witnesses, and also they can't make out why he went into the playing field."

Arnold nodded impatiently. "I knew something was up even before Muriel told me what happened when I got home last night. It was obvious that something had befallen Bish."

Don Tobin thought that a bit rich. Reading his expression, Arnold flushed. "I did know," he nagged, "because of the rubber bands. Remember me telling you—"

"Too well, Arnie. Get on with it."

"Well, there were no rubber bands, from my house right down to nearly where our road meets Station Avenue. Then there were a few—the usual pattern, he'd strip them off each bundle of mail before throwing them down every third house or so. In other words, he never finished his deliveries yesterday—" Arnold Horrobin's voice tailed away. "Wait a minute. That can't be right. I got my electricity bill and a seedsman's catalog yesterday morning. The post was delivered."

"Everyone got their letters as usual," Tobin agreed.

"But—" Frowning, Arnold fiddled with his umbrella. "Donald, Percy Bish *always* left a trail of rubber bands. Why on earth did he suddenly abandon the habit, partway along the road, the very morning he—er, passed away violently?"

Tobin stared at him. "I can think of a bloody good reason. Somebody finished the round for Bish. Put mail through the rest of the boxes. Not much risk. It was dark, and a foul day, rain tipping down. Not everyone is up and around at seven o'clock. Most of us keep banker's hours, right? Or they'd be having breakfast in the kitchen, at the back of the house."

"Poppycock, balderdash!" Out of his depth, Arnold was almost afraid. His was an orderly world, Tobin knew, where postmen delivered the mail and no sane person would dream of deputizing for them. "Why on earth would somebody do anything so—*bizarre?*"

Tobin was patient. "The police think Bish died after delivering all the letters. Logical, because they *were* delivered, and he got killed—apparently—a few paces from the final house he was supposed to service. Put it another way, Arnie. Say *you* went berserk and strangled Bish on your own front doorstep. If he was found there, who would the police suspect?"

"Oh," Arnold Horrobin breathed. His thin face, customarily pale, was greenish now. "Oh, dear."

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"Couldn't put it better myself." Rarely in their encounters, Don Tobin held the initiative. "You said the bands started a long way from your house. But the postman comes up the road from Station Avenue. Meaning the bands he threw away before A. N. Other took over *stopped* where you found the first ones that morning."

Arnold digested that for a moment before taking it aboard.

"A. N. Other," Tobin spelled out for him, "didn't know about throwing the bands away. That's why they stopped. Come to think of it, my mail was on the hall mat in a roll, an elastic band still round them. The wrappers were torn because they don't go through the slot in the door very easily kept together that way."

Tobin said: "Where did you find those first bands, Arnie?"

"Outside Number 8," Horrobin muttered. "Donald, we mustn't be precipitate."

Ignoring him, Tobin thought aloud, "Sharon Penny lives at Number 10. Elise says Bish was a womanizer, or wanted to be. Sharon takes 'Good morning' as an invitation to adultery."

"I don't like that sort of talk," Arnold frowned. "And—these are serious allegations. I really think—"

Mercilessly, feeling rather the same and so all the harder on Horrobin because of that, Don Tobin suggested, "It's none of our business? We mustn't get involved? If it was the result of a squalid affair, then the husband was provoked? Let's forget and forgive, keep our heads down and our mouths shut?" Tobin shook his head, his froglike face bleak. "No, Arnie. I'm not a fusspot and busybody, that's your department." It was a measure of his agitation that he could be so rude—a measure of Arnold Horrobin's, that the remark left him unmoved.

"But some things," Tobin went on, "demand involvement. You can't start taking over from courts and judges. Deciding somebody was ninety percent justifiably murdered. Killing's killing. Justified murder is like slight pregnancy, either it is or it isn't—and Percy Bish was throttled to death."

At last the train was rattling up to the platform. Tobin's hand fell on Horrobin's arm. "What I'm saying, Arnie, is that we've got to go to the police, right now."

To some extent the police were ahead of Horrobin and Tobin, thus all the readier to give them a hearing. Post-mortem examination had disclosed slight and subtle damage to Percy Bish's corpse soon

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after he had died, indicating that the body had been moved to its discovery place.

Frank Penny confessed within minutes.

He'd known about Sharon's infidelities without condoning them. He'd accepted her answering-machine pledges that each affair was the last. Then one afternoon, hit by migraine, he had left his office hours earlier than usual, to see Percy Bish's red bicycle propped against his garage wall—and the bedroom curtains firmly drawn.

Tragedies tend to be narrated in clichés. "It was the last straw," Frank Penny told the police. "A graceless little yob like that bloody postman.

"I never planned it. Obviously. Else I wouldn't have gone for him like I did, where I did. But Sharon always sleeps late of a morning, I potter round, I'm never in bed much past six-thirty. I heard that bastard whistling, I heard him kick our gate open. Funny—I'd noticed paint chipped off the gate, like vandalism. Never caught on it was him. It came to me, he was showing contempt. The gate *and* Sharon, both behind my back.

"So I yanked the door open and he was startled, but still sort of grinning, spit on his teeth, that look in his eyes. He might as well have been saying he knew something I didn't. But I did. And I choked the life out of him, shook him like a rat. It was great."

Moment of greatness past, Frank Penny panicked. "I fetched the wheelbarrow, rubber tire on the wheel. I keep my things nicely—it makes no noise. I put him in it, pushed him right up to the playing fields, and dumped him there. Then I came back and saw his bag hooked on the handlebars of the bike right outside my house. Good as a signpost. But my mind was fantastic that morning, quick as quick. I rode the bike up to the field gate, left the bag with it, and put all the letters through the mail slots."

Frank Penny never asked the police how they had suspected him. The truth was that in the pocket of the anorak he had worn on the morning of the murder were a number of rubber bands.

"Q"

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EQMM "first story" #621 was written by John Carlson, a 33-year-old copy editor and feature writer for a daily newspaper in Muncie, Indiana:

"I have a lovely wife named Nancy, a lovely daughter named Katie, and a lovely Harley-Davidson with no name at all. My interests include flying and searching for the ultimate cheeseburger."

The setting is the Colorado Rockies. The path curved three, maybe four more times along waist-high walls of rock, then gave way to a small open area on the eastern cliff face. A balcony seat, and no railing. A story to be read by vertigo-sufferers at their own risk, but the rewards are very much there . . .

BUSINESS PARTNERS

by JOHN CARLSON

With our new satellite dish set up out back, I can get Chicago stations here in the Rockies, which means you'd normally need dynamite to move me from my box-seat sofa on summer Saturday afternoons. But when you're a professor of ornithology and somebody calls to say he's spotted an ivory-billed woodpecker, you go look for it. They're even rarer than ninth innings in which my Cubbies are holding an 8–7 edge over the Phils.

"He didn't say who he was?" I said, spearing a lace through the grommets in my boots with one eye and keeping the other on the game.

Pam had my binoculars and camera case ready. "Nope," she said with a shake of the head. "He was in a hurry."

I lighted up a nice long San Martinez before leaving the driveway. By the time it was finished, I was bouncing along the rutted access

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road that leads to Stag Point on the southern fringe of Bear Paw National Forest.

When the road faded into a wall of pines, I parked it and got out, then walked braced against the steeply sloped forest floor toward the grey, craggy rock barely visible between the trees. I kept my eyes peeled for my benefactor and my bird, but didn't see either.

Let me tell you about Stag Point. From the east, my direction of approach, it looks like a rock rising maybe ten or fifteen feet from the ground. To either side, the ground seems to curve gently toward the valley. But when you climb out toward the lip of the rock, a funny thing happens—Mother Earth goes byebye, as my daughter might say. Those slopes on either side seem tame enough, but from the Point itself there's a sheer drop to the rocks below. I don't know how far down it is and I don't want to. Legend has it you can pitch a stone into space and read most of *War and Peace* before you hear it hit bottom.

I saw no one. Pam had said Stag Point, I was sure. I took a peek over the side, felt my knees go rubbery, and decided to hike down. Like I said, the slope on either side isn't too bad. In a quarter hour, I'd reached the valley floor and trudged back to the foot of the cliff. Nobody, no bird. I hollered once and my echo answered.

I was about to choose a path back to the top when a paper sack, stuck under the overhang of a nearby rock, caught my eye. I said "Damn it," and wished food poisoning on whoever had left it there.

It wasn't until I bent to reach for it that I saw someone's outstretched arm, smashed and bloodied.

Overhead, the sky was tomato-red. I shifted my position on the log, took a deep drag from my borrowed cigarette, and watched as four kids in tan smocks put the body on a stretcher. The county deputies in their brown uniforms and the conservation officers in their green ones talked and watched, having finished searching the area, snapping pictures, and taking my statement. A hulking, white-haired man in jeans and a flannel shirt, his face still flushed from the walk down, looked my way after talking to a deputy and came over.

"I'm Sheriff Durkin," he said. "You the one who found that guy?"

I nodded.

He looked over his shoulder as the ambulance attendants, one on each corner, lifted the stretcher. "Mess," he said, turning back around. "How'd you happen to find him way out here in the boonies?"

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I went through my story, from the phone call, to finding the body, to climbing back up and driving to Mae Kilroy's highway diner and calling the police.

"Suppose he's the one who called you?"

"Could be. There are people in the birding association I don't know who probably know me. He could have called from the diner, too, then come back and fallen."

Durkin chuckled. "Hell of a thing."

That little laugh got to me. "What's that? What's so funny?"

"I've known people to die for love and die for money, but this could be the first in my experience to die for a woodpecker."

He had a point. I managed a hollow chuckle of my own.

When we stood to leave, I remembered I hadn't even asked who the dead man was. Durkin tugged a wallet from his shirt pocket and began flipping through the card section.

"McKillip."

"Really? I once had a business partner named McKillip, Ray McKillip. I hope this wasn't a relative."

It was a few seconds before I realized Durkin was staring at me—another few seconds before I realized why.

"You're kidding, right?" I said.

"We'll talk on the way into town," he said.

"But *you* reported it!" Pam said. It was one in the morning and she was making me a toasted-cheese sandwich. I always burn them.

I took a sip of beer and said, "I know. That didn't seem to make a whole lot of difference to him."

"But how can they think you killed someone?"

"How can they help but think that?" I said, pausing for a yawn. "A guy who hated my guts falls off a cliff in the middle of umpteen hundred thousand acres of national forest and I just happen to find him while looking for a bird that may be extinct. Great story."

"But I can confirm it!"

"They might think you're a bit biased, babe."

Pam brought my sandwich to the table and took a seat. "If the sheriff suspects you, he's just plain stupid."

I washed down a bite with a swallow of beer. "Hey, tell me about it. As soon as he found out I was an ornithologist, he wanted to know what it'd cost to fix his wife's overbite."

It made the *Sunday Clarion-Ledger*. The headline read LOCAL

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MAN DIES IN FALL FROM STAG POINT and there was a kicker above it reading "Professor Who Found Body Questioned." The text quoted Durkin as saying there were no suspects and the incident remained under investigation—and that I was still being questioned at deadline.

Something seemed weird at my eight o'clock class Monday. Then I realized everybody had moved back about two rows, as if to make a little moat around my desk.

Nobody stuck around after class.

It wasn't until I retreated to my office that I learned the full extent of my notoriety, though. There was a knock at the door, I told whoever it was to come in, and Randy Prescott entered, a crisp bill in his hand.

"Here's the twenty I owe you from the Super Bowl," he said.

I watched, stunned, as it fluttered through the air to land lightly on my desk. The bet was from the 1977 football season.

"From here on out, pardner, I'm stayin' on your good side," he said.

"I hope that's a joke."

"It is."

"Har-har."

"Let me know if you need anything," he said, backing out the door.

That night we sat in bed, Pam munching carrots. I smoked a thick, stubby Punch.

"Judy came over and said he was asking the neighbors questions," she said.

"What kind of questions?"

"The usual. What are you like? Who do you associate with? How often do you beat your kids?"

I blew a smoke ring and stabbed it with my cigar. "He was doing the same thing around school, too. Talked to Randy. Dean Hunt. Even a couple of students."

She finished her last carrot slice. "Do you think we should get an attorney? Just to be safe?"

"Maybe. I dunno. It'd make me look like I've got something to hide."

"Durkin thinks you do anyway. I don't mind telling you, I'm pretty spooked right now."

I put an arm around her shoulder and pulled her to me. "Try not to worry," I told her. "I'll think of something . . ."

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Betty McKillip stared as though she couldn't believe her eyes, which were bloodshot and puffy as pillows.

"What are you doing here?" she asked when I didn't dissolve into mist like an unwelcome apparition.

"Offering my condolences, for one thing."

"You must be joking."

"And trying to find out about what happened to Ray."

"You know damned well what happened to him," she said, her voice a monotone. In the background, from another room, I could hear the drone of other voices, probably family members gathered for the funeral.

"If I could just—"

Her voice came alive. "I, I, I! You always come first, don't you, Cliff? It was the same with the liquor store. A few bad months and off you went—but *you* still had that nice salary to fall back on."

"I stayed with it as long as I could, Betty."

"And when you left we had nothing! He couldn't find work. Do you know what happened then? He went into the woods. Just for a day at first. Lately, though, he just stayed out there. Three, four days at a time he was gone. I tried to put him back on track. Maybe eventually I could have, but not now."

Through the screen door, I saw tears splash from her eyes. Mine stung, too. "What motive could I have had for killing Ray, Betty? Have you asked yourself that?"

"You know as well as I do you carried insurance on each other. I found his policy yesterday. They're in force through the end of the year."

She was right—we'd purchased the policies as business partners. I'd forgotten about them.

"You think I'd risk spending my life in prison for twenty thousand dollars?"

"I think you would. I think you *have*. Now get out of here, and take your junk with you," she said, her voice cracking.

"What junk?"

"In the garage. A cardboard box. It's things Ray brought home when he cleaned out the shop. I want them out of here now." The door slammed shut.

Randy Prescott turned the grey, bony object over and over, studying it through the cloud of sweet smoke rising from the bowl of his corncob pipe.

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"Antler."

"Antler?"

"Yep. Elk, I'd say."

I'd found it in the box under a tangle of neon beer signs, extension cords, strips of calculator paper, and empty liquor bottles, a reminder of why our little business venture failed. I didn't tell Betty that, but in the back of her mind she must have known.

Prescott tossed it to me. "I wonder what anybody'd want with this?" I said.

He laughed and relit his pipe. "You kidding, pal. There's bucks in them thar things."

"How so?"

"The mating game. Some parts of the world they're considered an aphrodisiac. Show an American an elk antler and he sees an elk antler. Show one to a fella in the Orient and he sees a hot time in the old town tonight. And they're willing to pay for it."

"How much?"

"Ground up, two thousand dollars a pound almost. Of course, nobody'll pay anything near that over here, but they can still make a walk in the woods rewarding, assuming you've got a place to get rid of 'em. It's like finding money on the ground."

"On the ground?"

"Sure, elk shed 'em."

"Sounds easy enough."

"It is," he said with a nod. "Of course, if you're not the kind of guy who worries about matters like the law and prison, you can collect 'em before the bulls are ready to give 'em up voluntarily."

I wanted to see Betty again like I wanted to trade places with Ray, but went anyway. After I knocked, a voice from the darkness on the other side of the screen door said, "Look who's here." The words came out slow as cold motor oil.

She was stretched out on the sofa, a bottle and glass on the floor beside her. "An' whadid you want?" she asked, reaching for a drink.

I pulled an envelope of five hundred-dollar bills from my pocket and put them on a bookshelf by the door. "It's a few bucks," I said. "You look like you could use some."

There was a quick flash of hate, but it drowned in her booze. "Much 'bliged. More money for this," she said, raising her glass again. "Now what did you really come'ere for?"

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"Ray may have been out doing a little work for someone when he died. I'd like to know who."

She laughed. "If I knew, why would I tell you? S'no business of yours."

"Whoever it was might owe you some money."

She laughed again, then cried. I walked over, put a hand on her shoulder, and she screamed. "You killed him!"

The bottle in her hand missed my head, flew loose, and broke against the wall. I had to push her into the sofa to keep her from clawing strips of skin from my face. "Did he even think he might have a job?" I demanded.

"No!"

"No leads? Not even a prospect?"

"No!" Just when she looked ready to scream again, though, she quieted down. I guess I had the booze to thank.

Her lids were drooping. "Maybe Irvin or something," she mumbled.

"Who's that?" I said. When she didn't answer, I shook her. "Irvin? First name? Last name?"

"Maybe—maybe not. Over 'n Windfall."

I shook her again, but she was gone.

Pam answered the phone, then handed it to me. "It's the Incredible Hulk," she whispered.

"Morning, sheriff," I said.

"Mrs. McKillip just called me," he said. "Why're you bothering her?"

My breakfast omelet flipped around my stomach like a lively trout. "Just looking out for my own interests. Nobody else seems to want to."

"Guilty conscience?"

"Not in the least."

"You quit bothering that woman."

"Or?"

"I'll let it be a surprise." He hung up.

When my eight o'clock ended, I walked to the library, found the DuPage County phone directory, and then the Windfall listings. There were no Irvins or Ervins. Irvings were another matter. There were six individual listings under that name: Bruce, Daniel, Edward, Harry, Rose, and Victor. Another number, that of Irving Bros.

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Trucking, Inc., stood out in bold type. I jotted down names and addresses, then killed time until my noon class. By 1:05 I was on State Road 32, heading west.

Harry Irving of Irving Bros. Trucking, Inc. looked as wide as the old oak desk he was sitting behind. He sliced a piece of salami from a chunk cradled in his hand, impaled it on the tip of his folding knife, and brought it to his mouth. "Don't know the guy," he said, the words flowing together with saliva as he chewed.

On the other side of the office door someone was loosening or tightening lug nuts with a pneumatic gun. I tried to speak between the tat-a-tatta-tat-atats.

"Black hair, five-ten or eleven. Maybe a hundred sixty or seventy pounds. His wife—she thought maybe he'd seen you about work."

"I just said I don't know the guy."

Like a dummy, I said, "She sounded positive."

I was surprised when he got to his feet. Wide as he was, his height was proportionate to his girth. It seemed his head would graze the ceiling light as he stepped toward me. He leaned over so he could look me in the eye.

"One last time. I don't know the guy. Now do you want to get out of here on your own, or do you want help?"

I passed two guys on my way across the parking lot. Both were young; one was light-complexioned and the other was darker, with heavily hooded eyes—Hawaiian, I guessed.

"You guys know a Ray McKillip?" I said, but they just walked by me.

It's a long way between burgs out here. It doesn't help that for every mile of horizontal distance you travel you seem to do two more going up or down. That's why it was almost sundown before I got home.

Pam handed me a beer. "Any luck?"

"I thought I was going to get my butt kicked."

She made with the saucer eyes. "By whom?"

"Some mountain man named Harry. Runs a trucking company. I asked him if he knew Ray, but he wasn't much for answering questions."

"Did you hit every place on the list?"

I took a long drink and pulled the paper from my pocket. "Just about. Bruce wasn't home but his wife said he sells clothes—no way

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he'd want to hire anyone for anything. Daniel wasn't home either. A neighbor said he died last month. Edward's retired, no luck there. Harry you already heard about. I found him at his place of business—a trucking company. Rose is a sweet old lady, does dressmaking. That leaves Victor, but it was getting late and I was getting hungry. I'll call him tomorrow."

She opened a beer for herself. "Durkin stopped by."

"Oh?"

"He said the coroner set the time of death as sometime Friday night."

I laughed and slapped the kitchen table. "Really? It's about time we got that information, babe! This gets me off the hook!"

"What do you mean?"

I looked at her like she'd forgotten my name. "I mean Friday night is bridge night! Randy and Marge can tell him where I was!"

I noticed she didn't share my upsurge in spirit. "That's what I told him," she said.

"And?"

"He reminded me that Marge and I had gone shopping in Denver that day. She didn't get me back home until midnight, remember? We didn't play bridge."

That shopping trip had seemed like a month ago. "That was last week?" I asked.

"How's that for rotten timing?" Pam said.

At supper I chased peas around my plate. Afterwards, I turned on the television and found the Cubs playing the Mets, but even that didn't hold my interest. Finally I slid a few cigars into my leather pocket case and told Pam I was going for a drive.

I drove aimlessly for a quarter hour, smoking and listening to a tape of George Jones' hits, then realized I was back on the state highway. By half past nine I crested a mountain pass road and saw, like diamonds scattered across a length of black velvet, the lights of Windfall in the darkness below.

I got five bucks' worth of unleaded and directions to Victor Irving's address at a service station, then followed a zigzagging stretch of road through country where the sage coated the ground like fungus. The kid at the gas pumps had told me it was the first place on the right. It seemed forever until I spotted the dim, yellowish lights from the windows of a house set far back from the road.

My turn signal flasher was already blinking when the little voice

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in the back of the head said to forget it, so I cut my lights and angled in toward the brush instead. There seemed to be movement around the outbuildings behind the house, but it was hard to tell for sure. Remembering the binoculars I'd hidden under the seat, I pulled them out, slid across the seat, and leveled them through the lowered window. Focused, they barely revealed the dark shapes of men moving boxes across the open space between a shack and a barn. When a momentary flash of light shone from the left side, I brought the area within my field of vision. It flashed again. Headlights. The bulky black outline of a semi could be seen now.

But so what? I suddenly felt guilty, though of what I don't know. Spying? Of Ray's death? Of being miles from home on a lonely country road when I should have been with Pam?

The binoculars went back under the seat. As I slid behind the wheel, I considered the pros and cons of leaving or driving down to the house—just ask for the owner, say I'm trying to tie up some loose ends for the widow of a dear, departed friend. Did you know a Ray McKillip? His wife thought he might have seen you about some work. No? Okay, and thanks for your time.

Might as well, I thought. My fingertips were touching the keys when the flashlight came on in my eyes. I couldn't see who was holding it, but I could see what looked like the business end of a mighty large revolver.

"Out of the truck," a voice ordered.

I was in the barn, tied to a chair with my hands behind my back, and Harry Irving was telling me I should have minded my own business. His brother Victor kept saying, "Let's kill him." I kept trying to control my bladder.

"How'd you figure this out?" Harry asked.

"You're not going to believe this," I said, "but I haven't figured anything out." My voice carried the conviction born of truth.

"Well, let me explain it."

"I'd rather not know."

"Too bad," he said. "What I got, as you know, is a trucking company, which ain't necessarily the greatest way in the world to make a living. At least, it wasn't until I figured out an edge. Met a fellow in San Francisco who said he'd pay me good money for haulin' some damned elk antlers out to him. He sells 'em to the slants—gets 'em horny or something. So what the heck, me and Victor've poached a bit in our lifetime, and this helped pay the freight, you know?"

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I said, "Uh huh."

He helped himself to a cigar from my pocket, bit off the end, spit it out, and continued. "By and by, this fella and I get to be partners, friends like, and one day he said to me it didn't seem sensible that I'm bringing him nice stuff all the way from Colorado and not taking any nice stuff back, you know? So I said it sure didn't and that's how I started running cocaine back here. Nice, huh?"

He looked over his shoulder at Victor, gun in hand, standing guard at the door, then lowered his voice.

"You gotta understand, Victor ain't got a lot up here," he said, tapping the side of his head. "He met McKillip in a bar over in your town, got drunk with him, and started blabbing things about our activities he had no business telling. Even offered him a job. We had no choice."

"You did kill him."

"Had to. Victor'd even gave 'im a hunk of antler and some cocaine."

From the door, Victor said, "Let's kill him" again—and then a familiar voice said, "What's going on here?" No words ever sounded sweeter.

I spun in the chair toward the sound of the voice and cried, "Sheriff! These are the guys who killed McKillip!"

Harry started laughing. "Durkin knows. He was there."

One of the truckers I'd encountered when leaving Harry's office—the Hawaiian—was behind the wheel, and the other sat beside him. I was in the back seat between Harry and Durkin, who was explaining things as we drove through the night. Victor had been left behind.

"After he was dead, we figured Stag Point had been a mistake, too popular, but by then it was too late. We should've dumped him where nobody would've found him. Anyway, we figured we'd better stick somebody with it. Victor said McKillip had been badmouthing you at the bar. I checked the records, made sure you'd had a falling-out as business partners like he said, looked up your background—and that was that."

"You're the one who called about the woodpecker?"

"Sure am," Durkin said.

In the dark I couldn't tell where we were or even our direction of travel. "So what happens to me?" I said.

Harry chuckled. "Try not to think about it."

I felt a sense of panic expand like a balloon inside my chest, pushing the air from my lungs, but fought down an urge to struggle.

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It was hopeless here. I prayed that when the time came I wouldn't freeze, wouldn't stand there like a sheep while they slit my throat for me.

My thoughts were interrupted by Harry telling the driver to pull over. He led our procession into an area of towering rock formations. After a half hour of hard hiking, I saw a sliver of salmon sky on the eastern horizon and wondered if it was my last sunrise. Far below, the road we'd driven was a strip of black tape across a grey cardboard landscape.

The path curved three, maybe four more times along waist-high walls of rock, then gave way to a small open area on the eastern cliff face. A balcony seat, and no railing.

"C'mon, c'mon," Durkin said, glancing toward the horizon. The lightening sky was making him nervous.

Harry just smiled, then moved near a jagged crack in the floor of the rock. "Victor and me, we used to come here as kids. I don't know how far down this goes, but it's a ways."

The crack was wide enough to drop a body through. The whole way up, I'd figured I'd know when the right place to make a move came by, but it never had. I glanced back toward the path, but the two truckers were blocking it.

Harry held the revolver toward them. "You guys missed the other fun—want this?" Neither seemed to.

He looked at me. The smile was gone. As he raised the weapon, I lunged for him, heard the shot explode, and fell on my face.

I remember hearing Durkin say, "What?" and Harry screaming as he stepped into space.

I awoke to find the Hawaiian staring at me, Pam at his side.

I turned away to continue the business of dying, then felt a hand on my own. "Honey, are you awake?" When I turned back for a second look, Pam was still there, and so was he.

My eyes must have registered shock. "It's okay," she said quickly. "This is Mister Lund. He's a federal narcotics agent."

He leaned over and said, "Take it easy, pal. You've got a big hole in your shoulder."

I looked around and saw hospital colors. "How'd I get here?"

"Bloom and I carried you off the rock," he said. "Bloom's my partner, the guy I was with. Then you were helicoptered here."

I closed my eyes, and a movie about a giant with a revolver was playing across the back of my lids. "How about Irving?"

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Lund said, "He's dead. I fired the same time he did. As for Victor, he's on the run."

My throat was dry, so Pam stuck a straw in my mouth. Lund told me how he'd been planted in the Irving organization. Harry's San Francisco buddy had recommended him, it seems. Harry's San Francisco buddy had been busted the week before and had turned government informant.

I wanted to ask why he'd waited so long before taking Harry, but didn't have to.

"I'm sorry you ended up getting hurt," Lund said. "Up until those last few minutes on the rock we couldn't be sure what he had planned for you. We could have gotten him on the drug deal, but attempted murder would have put him away longer. For that we needed to see him take steps to put you away. I'm afraid we waited too long."

"Is that what happened to Ray McKillip?"

He shook his head. "We weren't around for that. The first we heard of that was on the drive to the rock."

The last few words barely registered as I drifted toward sleep. I felt Pam brush her lips against mine, then heard her and Lund walking away.

They were almost out of the room when I remembered. "How about Durkin?"

Pam said, "He's sitting in his own jail."

I smiled and slept.

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NOPLACE ELSE TO GO

by BARBARA OWENS

Billy Mayfair came home on a cold wet day in November.

No one saw him come into town—or, after twenty years, didn't recognize him if they did. It fell on Ed Sloane to be the first. Ed started down the bar as the stranger slid onto the end stool, but he slowed halfway, and when he stopped beer slopped over his glass and dripped through his fingers onto the floor.

"Billy?" he said without thinking, and a few heads started to turn.

Billy was smiling; his answer came slowly. "Hey, Ed." The soft voice barely carried. "They let me out."

Ed set his glass on the bar and wiped his wet hand with a rag. Creaks and rustles sounded in the tavern's dimness as attention began to focus on the end stool at the bar.

"Can I have a beer?"

Ed stared at his hand as he wiped and wiped it dry. All other conversation died.

"My God, Billy, what'd you come back here for?" was all he could think to say.

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Again the pause before the answer. "Noplace else to go," the soft voice said. And then, "I sure could use a beer."

A voice, faceless in the shadows, finally stripped the silence. "You're that Mayfair boy. You got one helluva nerve to come back here. Why don't you leave while you still can?"

Ed watched. It was Billy Mayfair, all right, in Jeffersville, actually sitting at the end of his bar. But no boy—not any more. He'd *been* a boy, just eighteen, when they sent him away to prison. A big kid—husky, wild. Fighter, drinker, part of a large trashy family, with a belligerent hunch to his shoulders and a sullen thin-lipped smile.

Now he'd be close to forty. The husky body was thick, softened; the face sagged, doughy. The hellfire Ed remembered in Billy Mayfair's eyes had gone out. Billy's eyes were flat, blank, and the quivering smile hadn't wavered since Ed looked up to see him settling unobtrusively at the end of the bar. Ed's brother-in-law, John Foley, had been police chief at the time of the murder, and Ed had been allowed to view Jo Barnett's butchered corpse. He'd never forgotten it, and now he watched hands that had driven a knife again and again into the young girl's body reach hesitantly into a cheap cloth wallet and pull out a single dollar bill. Billy smoothed it and laid it on the bar. He seemed unaware of the other men in the room.

"I've got money for the beer," he said, fixing his unfocused eyes and smile on Ed.

Everyone was waiting to see what Ed would do. Ed was still seeing Jo Barnett's naked dead body.

"I'm not gonna serve you, Billy." His voice came out thick and harsh. "What are you, crazy? Go on, get out! I don't want you in my place."

Billy kept smiling. Ed wondered what a knife felt like cutting between ribs.

Then Billy carefully replaced the bill inside his wallet and stepped down from the stool. Every eye watched him through the door and past the windows until he disappeared from sight.

Rollie Simpson was the first man inside the bar to move. He stood, pulling on his coat.

"I don't believe it. Who'd ever think he'd have the guts to come back here? Look, I've got to get back to the store. I'll stop by Verne's office and tell him. The police ought to know it, don't you think?"

"Yeah, okay," Ed said slowly. "I tell you, I feel like someone just walked across my grave . . ."

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By evening, when he and Pauline arrived for their weekly dinner with his sister, all Jeffersville seemed to know that Billy Mayfair was back. Ida Foley's hands shook visibly as she dished beef stew and applesauce onto their plates.

"What're you going to do about it, that's what I want to know. Are all you men just going to let him stay?"

"Do? What can we do? He served his time." Ed watched her mouth thin. Ida looked old. He hadn't noticed that her hair was almost completely white.

"Well, I'm glad John isn't alive to see it. He thought it was the best thing he ever did, helping put that animal away. And to think he's out, walking around like any other man, after what he did. And he had the gall to come back here!"

Red flared in her cheeks. Pauline said, "Remember your heart now, Ida. Don't get upset."

"You don't have any right to say that! You're not from around here—hadn't even met Ed yet. You don't know what it was like!"

"Lord knows I've heard enough about it over the years," Pauline said quietly.

"Well, just imagine opening the door in the middle of the night to find a—a dying person on your porch! Poor little thing—sixteen years old—trying to find John and get help. How she made it two blocks from her house I'll never know!" Ida's lips trembled. "Then having her die on me, right there on the porch, before I could get John home! You just don't know, Pauline—we never had anything like that happen here before or since. And now that killer's back, walking around as big as you please. Somebody'd better do something about it, that's all I have to say!"

"Lord, Lord," Pauline said on the way home. "Ida's going to get all fired up, isn't she?"

"A lot of people feel the same," Ed said. "And she's right about one thing. It's the worst thing ever happened in this town."

"Sure, it's terrible. But he paid. I almost feel sorry for him now with Ida winding up."

Ed had to smile. "Funny thing is, before it happened she never had a good word to say for the Barnetts, especially Jo. And Jo was wild—Billy sure wasn't the only boyfriend she had. Some of them married, so I heard. Now Ida and Marge Barnett are thick as thieves." His smile died, remembering. "But it was awful, what he did, Pauline. He cut her enough to kill her three times. How do you ever stop paying for that?"

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Her look was level. "He never said he did it."

"He never said anything. It didn't matter. It was his knife, he was with her all evening, and he took her home. Fifteen minutes later she was dead."

Pauline sighed. "You know, I've always thought that Ida was behind the rest—running his family out of town and all."

"Oh, Pauline."

"Somebody never stopped talking it up all over town. Somebody poisoned their dogs, then somebody set their house on fire. I've seen Ida in action. So have you."

"That's enough."

"You think she was behind it, too, don't you?"

"She's my sister!"

"But you do think so."

Ed didn't answer. The remainder of the ride passed in silence.

Early the next morning, before the regulars arrived, Billy came back to the tavern, sliding onto the same stool by the door. Ed came out of the back room and found him there. They eyed each other the length of the bar. Billy's smile trembled.

"I got five dollars, Ed. Can I buy a bottle of whiskey for five dollars?"

"Buy it someplace else."

"Nobody'll sell to me. It gets cold nights. A bottle would warm me up real good."

Ed looked away from the eyes and smile. "Don't you understand, Billy? Why don't you just leave here? Where's your family?"

That damnable pause before each answer, as though it took time for Billy to take it in and sort it out. "I don't know," he said finally. "Do you?"

"Where'd you sleep last night?" The temperature had dipped to twenty-eight degrees.

"Out by the graveyard in a culvert. How about that bottle there? Can I buy that?"

"That one's eight dollars."

"I only got five. That's all they give me when they let me out."

"How long's it been since you had something to eat?"

"How about that one? How much is it?"

Ed jerked the bottle up and slammed it down before him on the bar. "That's a dollar. Take it and get out. Don't come back, Billy, you hear me?"

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He was still smoothing the bill with his fingers when Rollie Simpson pushed open the door.

"Was that Billy I saw leaving? You serve him, Ed?"

"Why?"

"I hear no one else in town will."

"He's sleeping in a culvert out by the cemetery, Rollie. He looks more dead than alive."

Rollie eased onto a stool, smoothing the grey waves in his hair. "We've been friends for a long time, Ed. Be careful. Folks are getting worked up all over again. Been hearing the talk? I wouldn't want to be Billy Mayfair right about now."

Ed buried the dollar in the register at the bottom of the stack. Rollie's manner didn't set right this morning. "Looking a little baggy under the eyes today. Hard night?"

Rollie sighed, shaking his head. "I got one now that's gonna kill me. But you look close at me in my coffin. There'll be a smile, a *big* smile, on my face."

Easing back onto familiar ground, Ed grinned. "I don't know how you do it. One of these days Dottie's gonna get smart and you'll be one sorry hound, old buddy."

Rollie grinned back. "Never happen. Come on, gonna be a big day in hardware, I feel it. Give me one to start the blood moving. And don't you worry about old Rollie."

That night over supper Pauline said, "Talk's starting already. About how Billy Mayfair should be run out of town."

Ed said nothing.

"It only takes one or two to get it going. And there's always one or two more than glad to do it."

He couldn't avoid her eyes. "You mean Ida?"

Pauline only looked at him until he had to look away.

Later in the evening the phone rang. "Is it true that you sold Billy Mayfair whiskey?" Ida demanded without preamble.

"Who told you that?"

"Never mind who told me—everyone knows it. You make me ashamed. What came over you? No one else will have a thing to do with that—that man. He ought to be run out of town before he kills ssomebody else."

Next day at the tavern Ed listened as one of the Carmichael brothers told how his sister had heard about Billy Mayfair living out by the cemetery, half starved.

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"Anna never passed up a stray. She took a bunch of groceries out there and left it in the ditch. Well, Billy must've seen her, because pretty soon he showed up at her house wanting to work it off. Wouldn't take no for an answer, she said. She finally let him haul some wood up close to the house—her husband's laid up with his hip, you know—then Billy took off."

"Anna better watch out," someone said. "Most people might think that kind of thing encourages him to stay."

Carmichael shrugged heavy shoulders. "Anna never much cared about what most people think," he said.

"I don't like it," Pauline said that night. "Talk's really getting ugly. Surely you hear it, too."

Ed had fought a headache all day. "Of course I hear it! You think my ears fell off? Nobody talks about anything else."

The next evening she reported, "I saw Ruth Tucker in the laundromat today. She had Billy over to mow her yard. You know it's hard on her since Jack took off. She said he did a good job and wouldn't take anything for it except a sandwich and a can of beer."

"What do you want, Pauline? Want him over to mow our yard?"

"Did I say that? I'm only telling you what I hear. Ruth did say he could use something warm to wear, though."

It was a gradual thing. Over the next several days Ed heard how Billy was doing odd jobs here and there, how someone had given him a packing crate to sleep in, and after closing one night Rollie told him over a late drink that some widow on the west side was talking about letting Billy live in a shed in her back yard.

"I don't know," Rollie said slowly. He'd had a few too many; his tongue was thick. "Some people seem to forget what he did and are taking him back like it never happened."

"Is that bad?" Ed asked. He really wanted to know. Between Ida on the one side and Pauline on the other, he felt like a worm stretched between two birds.

Rollie's eyes crinkled and his white teeth showed. "Your heart beginning to bleed, too, old buddy? You want to run out to that culvert and give him a big kiss because he cut that poor little girl into hamburger meat?"

Ed straightened slowly. The whole county knew about Rollie Simpson's temper, especially when he was drinking. Over the years Ed had learned to walk softly—he never knew what might set Rollie off.

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"I didn't say that. Just making talk, that's all."

"Your sister's already put out with you, you know," Rollie said softly.

"You been talking to Ida?"

"Everybody's been talking to Ida. Ida takes a personal interest, and she heard that Billy's wearing a green-and-gold-checked jacket. She thinks it sounds like one you used to have."

Ed shifted. "Is that so?"

"Well, I lived in this town all my life and I never knew another coat like that."

"I didn't have a thing to do with that," Ed said heavily, and finally Rollie laughed. He pushed back his chair.

"Pauline's really wore you down, hasn't she, old buddy? Well, I got to go. There's something waiting for me over in Baytown that won't cool down until I get there. You go on home like a good boy."

"Dottie's gonna get you one of these days," Ed grinned, relieved.

"Don't you worry about old Rollie. Rollie don't get caught."

He was sleeping so heavily he didn't hear the phone ring, and he came up fighting when Pauline shook him hard.

"Ed, get up. Get dressed. Hurry! Billy Mayfair's been hurt."

"What? What?"

"Come on. He's out there lying in the road."

"What—what time is it?"

"After two. Ellen Parker just called. They came by and saw Billy on the road out by the cemetery. Joe wouldn't stop, but she says it looks like he's hurt bad—she saw blood. Someone has to help him. Come on!"

They brought him back in the car, down the alley, into the tavern's back room. Ed stood by, helpless, while Pauline washed blood away. There was a lot of it, more than he had seen since—

He blinked away the memory and Pauline looked up, face white and furious.

"Someone beat him up bad. There's more than I can handle. Call George Hicks."

He couldn't look away from Billy's pale unconscious face—his big murderer's hands lying limp, palms up, on the floor. "What makes you think he'll come?"

"I don't know if he'll come. Just call him!" It was the sight of tears shining in her eyes that finally sent him fumbling for the phone.

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Dawn streaked the east when the doctor finally finished with Billy and pulled an old blanket over him on the floor.

"Somebody did a good job on him. Looks like it might have been a piece of pipe. By rights he should be moved to a hospital. Nothing vital, but those broken ribs are going to hurt like hell."

Ed sat hunched in a chair by the door. "Leave him here. He'll be all right with us. You know who he is?"

Hicks straightened. "Only what I've heard. I hadn't come here yet when it happened." He drew out a prescription pad.

"Put that thing in my name," Ed said. "Otherwise we might not get it filled. And we'll pay your bill, my wife and me."

Hicks looked down at Billy lying on the floor. "There won't be any bill. You just take care of the medication. You know, I should report this to the police."

"They'll know soon enough," Pauline said. "It'll be all over town by noon. Thank you, George."

"Thank *you*."

After he'd gone, they shared a stiff drink, sitting opposite each other over Billy on the floor.

"He said he just had noplace else to go," Ed said finally.

Pauline shook her head. "I don't think that poor man ever had anyplace to go."

"I'll go get that old cot from the garage. You know, it may take me a while to figure out how I got stuck with him."

Pauline smiled. "Maybe it'll come to you."

"If it doesn't, I'm counting on you to explain it all to me."

The tavern filled early, some curious, many seeming sympathetic. Just before noon, Pat Carmichael and his sister Anna pushed through the door. Anna carried a big pot in her hands.

"I've never set foot in a tavern, Ed Sloane, but I've brought Billy something to eat. Is he awake?" Ed nodded. "Then you see that he eats it before it gets cold."

Billy's smile was in place, trembling at the corners. Ed stood inside the door watching him eat. "How you feel? I've got some pills to help the pain."

"I'm all right."

"Who did this to you, Billy, do you know?" The smile ducked; the eyes slid away. "You do, don't you? Who?"

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"I'm obliged to you, Ed, for the bed and all," Billy said after the pause. "I'll work to pay it off."

"You want a regular job?" Ed heard himself saying. "You could clean up, keep the stock straight, help me at the bar. I can't pay you much, but you can sleep here, get you a hot plate to cook on."

He waited through the silence. "I could use a job," was all Billy said. "And this is a real nice room."

Ed lost some business, a few men who couldn't drink in the same room with a cold-blooded murderer. But opinion seemed to take a slow turn after the beating. No one actually accepted Billy, but they lived with him. In a week or two they even seemed used to him. It was difficult to see a frenzied killer in the big shambling man who swept the floor, cleaned the tables and bar, and never spoke unless he was spoken to. Sometimes even Ed forgot he was there, waiting in the corners to be told what to do. Besides, with Christmas coming, minds filled up with other things.

Ida called Ed when she heard the news. Pauline sat smiling at him while they talked.

"She says she'll never speak to me again until I come to my senses and get rid of him," Ed said when he was done.

Pauline looked serene. "Well, that's one Christmas present we won't have to buy."

"You're a good man, Ed," Rollie told him. "I don't believe I would have done it in your place. Have to keep you handy—you might turn out to be a good influence on me."

Things seemed quiet. Late one night Ed and Pauline shared a last cup of coffee before bed. "You know, it's hard to remember him like he used to be," Ed said suddenly. "He was never in any real trouble before the murder, just drunk and raising hell most of the time. I think it was the way he looked. I was older and didn't know him that well, but he always looked at you like you'd done something personal to him and he wanted to blow your head off. Now he's—different. Simple. Almost like he's not quite right, you know?"

Pauline blew gently into her coffee to cool it. "I wonder what it's like to go through a murder trial when you're eighteen and haven't got a friend in the world? And then to spend twenty years inside a prison?"

Billy was healing slowly. On a cold snowy evening after closing, he finished sweeping and settled in a corner table with a beer. Ed poured one for himself, hesitated, and joined him, pulling out the opposite chair.

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"Christmas next week, Billy. If you don't have any plans, Pauline and I want you to come for dinner."

Billy's eyes slid across him and away. "Naw," he said finally, smiling into the empty bar. "I'll be fine here."

In the silence Ed listened to the old refrigerator chugging away in the back room.

"Any of your folks come to see you while you were away, Billy?"

He counted four cars passing outside the big glass windows before an answer came in the soft flat voice. "Naw."

"Not once?"

Slowly Billy's eyes moved back to his. His smile flickered.

"Well, they was all just trash. You know?"

Ed leaned across the table. A question he'd never known lived inside his head slid out—low, cautious. "You *did* do it, didn't you?"

For an instant Billy's eyes widened; his smile seemed real, twisted in something secret. Then it was gone. He took a long swallow from his beer. "Everybody said I did."

Ed recalled it vividly—a packed country courtroom, a big manacled boy in ill-fitting clothes wearing an arrogant smile.

"Billy, it was your knife! You'd been with Jo that night, every night. And you didn't—you never opened your mouth from the time John Foley arrested you! Why'd you *do* that?"

Something came alive in Billy Mayfair's eyes. Outwardly his expression remained unchanged, but there was something in his eyes, almost visible, and Ed hunched closer over the table. The wait was painful.

"Nobody would've listened," Billy said finally. "They had their minds made up." His gaze drifted—the moment had passed. "I didn't even have—I'd lost that knife. I've tried to remember—there was something about—"

His gaze drifted through the tavern's interior, crossing Ed, but not seeing him. He was talking to himself, and the careful monotony of the words sounded like a solitary recitation repeated countless times before. "Witnesses. As I understand it, it all has to do with them. You got to have some or it goes against you. If there's witnesses, no one can hold back or lie. Yes, sir, witnesses is about the most important thing there is." He nodded slowly and he was Billy again, eyes empty, wasted. The smile wavered across the table. "I believe I've about got it figured out."

Ed let out a long breath. "Are you telling me you didn't do it?"

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"I sure thought a lot of Jo," Billy said. He seemed to become aware of Ed. "Now I guess I'll go to bed."

Ed sat frowning through the windshield into the snow as the car warmed. When he pulled out of the alley, he turned left instead of right.

A light shone through Ida's kitchen window. His sister's mouth hardened when she saw who was standing at her door.

"I don't want to talk to you," she began, but Ed pushed through into the hall.

"I'm going to ask you something, Ida, that's kind of bothered me for a long time. Why didn't you testify at Billy Mayfair's trial?"

The hall light was dim, but he thought he saw something flash in her eyes—then she stepped backward and they were in shadow. Her head rose in the old imperious way.

"You barge in here in the middle of the—"

"Jo Barnett practically died in your arms. You should have been the most important witness at the trial."

"I don't have to listen—you *know* why! I was in the hospital with nervous exhaustion. My heavens, if you'd had something like that happen—"

"Did you see something—didn't she say anything, anything at all? You tell me again, Ida, that nothing happened but she pounded on your door and died!"

Face white, she shoved him aside and flung open the door. Cold air and snow swooped into the hall.

"Get out of my house, Ed Sloane, I don't care if you *are* my only brother! I don't have to stand for this. You heard my statement at the trial. It was read by those lawyers exactly the way it happened. There's nothing wrong with that. John fixed it so it could be done that way. Since you seem to be taking up with white trash now, you just leave my house!"

Ed felt cold—from the air, the snow, and the tic twitching in his sister's cheek.

"Yes," he said. "I believe you, Ida. John fixed it. Now that I think back, I believe John could have fixed just about anything. Sleep well, sister. Good night."

"Is there anything we can do?" was Pauline's reaction when he told her.

"What? It's only a hunch I have." Ed shook his head. "It was too long ago, Pauline. I don't think anything can be done now . . ."

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On Christmas morning, he drove carefully through new snow to the tavern, Pauline's holiday dinner for Billy riding alongside. Billy was watching television, seated at the darkened bar. The sight of the big hulking figure slouched in the corner stool suddenly irritated him.

"For God's sake, Billy, it's all right to turn on the lights!"

Billy's smile swung toward him. "I kind of like the dark," he said. "There was always lights on in the prison."

Ed felt like a fool. Pouring two shots of his best whiskey, he set them on the bar. "Don't mind me," he said. "Was it pretty bad there for you?"

Billy's eyes reflected only light from the television screen. "I don't ever want to go back," was the simple answer.

Awkwardly, Ed raised his glass.

"To better days. I mean it, Billy."

"That sounds good," Billy said, and tipped his own to the tremulous smile.

On the afternoon before the New Year, Ed's place was capacity only. No one had yet lost control, but the voices were loud, talk dirty, and some weren't likely to arrive at one of the many parties scheduled for later. The point in the proceedings had been reached where Rollie Simpson entertained with stories of his conquests, past and present, and some of the escapades he'd participated in when he was young. Everyone had heard it before, but Rollie was a born storyteller and most of the listeners secretly envied him even if they didn't approve. Kept busy behind the bar, Ed listened with one ear while he slit open two new cases of beer with a hunting knife.

"You want to know some of the best times I ever had?" Rollie was saying.

His tongue was thickening. He might never make it to the eager young widow he'd been bragging he would entertain after his and Dottie's New Year's bash that night. Ed was thinking of that bash, wondering if he could beg off without making Rollie mad. He was tired, and Pauline had been nursing a cold.

"Some of the best times I ever had were riding around with John Foley when he was chief. We'd cruise alleys and dirt roads looking for parkers. Turn off the lights, sneak up—then blast 'em with the lights and siren. Scare hell right out of them! Bet we found a few of you guys, right?" He choked, pounding on the bar. Ed had to grin, remembering a time or two of his own.

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"And drunks! Boy, was John dead set against drunks. We'd find one and John would work him over. Make him turn out his pockets, shove him around a little, throw him in the back of the car. Got so they'd start shuffling off when they saw him coming, but he always got them. He was a bulldog, John was—he never let go."

Ed didn't know what made him look up. He didn't hear or see anything, but he looked directly to Billy standing in the back-room door. Billy was smiling and his lips were moving. He was saying something to Rollie, but no one heard his soft voice in the din. Ed didn't know what showed in his own face, but it was enough for the men to notice, and it hushed them instantly, until there was only Rollie chuckling into his glass and Billy's voice, uninterrupted.

"—that to me. Did that to me all the time. I used to wonder if maybe you two come looking for me, the way you always showed up."

Rollie swung around, squinting at Billy in the door.

"What?" he said, blinking. "You say something to me?"

Billy moved two hesitant steps into the room. "I said I remember that. How you used to lay me down with my face in the street and go through everything I had on me." He grinned wider; he and Rollie were sharing a joke.

Rollie straightened on his stool. His whole body leaned toward Billy. Ed set his hunting knife on the bar and took a step.

"Billy—"

Rollie snorted. "As I remember you, Billy, you were face down in the street most of the time anyway." This brought appreciative snickers from some of the men, and Rollie grinned wider. "I always seem to think of you in those days as in the dirt."

Billy nodded, almost eagerly. He took another step into the room. "I just remembered the night you and that Mr. John Foley caught me out back of the school. I was probably drunk, but I wasn't bothering anybody. He sure pounded on me some, though, didn't he, and you took away my knife." Billy hunched his shoulders, his silly grin seeming to light up the room. "Remember when you took my knife away, Rollie? Remember that night?"

Even in the dim light, Ed saw Rollie's eyes change. He knew Rollie's temper; he didn't think Billy did. He was going to move, going to say or do something, but then what Billy had said hit him, and he couldn't move if he tried. He could only watch Rollie's eyes and see Billy take another step closer.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Rollie's voice was quiet,

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but it had changed, flattened. "I never took any knife away from you."

"I just remembered," Billy said. "I couldn't think where it had gone."

All Ed heard was the sound of Rollie's breathing. Then someone said in a shocked voice, "Does he realize what he's saying?"

Rollie heard. He tried to smile; his pupils had shrunk to half their size. "That's not funny, Billy. I know you're kind of stupid since you came back, but you better tell these people here that what you just said is a lie."

For an instant Billy seemed confused. Then he shook his head. "No. That's right, Rollie. I didn't even have my knife when Jo died. You did."

The air changed in the room, as though everyone had drawn a breath at once. Ed wanted to reach out, touch Rollie's arm, say something to Billy, but he couldn't. And Billy just kept on talking.

"I forget some things that night. After Jo and me had the fight—" He stopped. Breath hissed in his throat. "Jo was real—special. I thought probably we'd get married. But that night she—she said she had another boyfriend. Somebody older. He was married, but he was going to dump his wife for her. She didn't want to be my girl any more—she said for me to leave, that he was coming over. I said—I got real mad—I said he probably wouldn't marry her, he was lying. But she said no, he promised, and she'd make him do it or tell it all over town. She made me go. I got drunk—" he smiled, remembering "—I got so drunk. I was still drunk when they came to get me." His wide unfocused eyes settled on Rollie. "But, Rollie, you know I didn't have my knife." The rest of it hung in the air, unspoken.

Ed lunged, but he missed. With a sound deep in his throat, Rollie's hand closed around the hunting knife on the bar and he was gone from his stool. Billy was the bigger man, but his hands never lifted from his sides as the knife drove into him, again and again, even as he fell. He was on the floor before the men managed to pull Rollie off, and Ed was the first to kneel beside him. They all heard him, but only Ed recognized the flare in his eyes—the old hellfire, one last terrible blaze. His smile reached for Rollie through the crowd.

"Witnesses—all these witnesses. Most—important thing. I got you, Rollie! Oh, I got you!"

That night Ed lay stretched sleepless, trying to work it through.

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He thought, deep down somewhere, he must have suspected it could have been Rollie who gave Billy the beating. He'd known Rollie all his life, and it was the kind of thing Rollie might do. But the rest of it—not that. He'd never even suspected Rollie could be capable of that.

At least now it was over, finally done. He'd arrange for Billy's funeral and he'd testify at Rollie's trial. His mind churned, aching, through the night.

But not once did it brush past Ida. He didn't know, would never know, that across town Ida had heard the news and was rocking. Rocking in her chair, watching the front door, where once a young girl appeared late at night, bleeding, murmuring, "Help—help me—Rollie Simpson, he— Help—I think I'm going to die."

"Q"

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

CANADIAN CAPERS: Readers who keep up with the latest novels have probably noticed an increasing number of mysteries by Canadian authors, including Ted Wood's *Dead in the Water,* winner of the 1983 Scribner Crime Novel Award. Part of the reason might be the formation of the Crime Writers of Canada in 1982. This group, numbering some eighty members across Canada, with a few residing in the United States, is promoting Canadian mystery writing for the first time.

In 1984 CWC inaugurated an annual Awards Banquet to honor the recipient of the Arthur Ellis Award for the best Canadian mystery novel. ("Arthur Ellis" was the traditional pseudonym used by Canada's hangmen.) The first winner was Eric Wright for his novel *The Night the Gods Smiled* (Scribners), with a special Chairman's Award to Derrick Murdoch for his weekly review column in the Toronto *Globe & Mail.*

October of 1984 saw publication of the first CWC anthology, *Fingerprints,* edited by Beverley Beetham-Endersby (Toronto: Irwin Publishing), a trade paperback priced at $12.95 Canadian. Its sixteen stories include reprints by Margaret Millar, James Powell, and Elaine Slater, as well as thirteen new tales by Tim Heald, Eric Wright, Ellen Godfrey, Howard Engel, CWC Chairman Tony Aspler, and others.

Coming up next year is the most important event yet on CWC's calendar—the 4th International Congress of Crime Writers, scheduled for October 7–11, 1986, in Toronto. It follows prior Congresses in London, New York, and Stockholm, and planning is already under way.

SPILLANE AND THE CRITICS: Critical opinions of mystery writers often change over the decades, and perhaps the reputation of S. S. Van Dine is the best evidence of it. A best-selling mystery writer who strongly influenced the early Ellery Queen and scores of others, Van Dine's reputation began its decline after his first six novels and hit bottom some years back when all of his books were out of print. Today there's been a re-

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vival of sorts with the books in print again, both in hardcover from Gregg Press and in paperback from Scribner Crime Classics.

It cannot be said that Mickey Spillane's reputation suffered a similar critical decline, since most critics were quick to denounce his excesses from the beginning. But in recent years a number of younger writers and critics have been taking a second look at Spillane. Two of them who like what they see are Max Allan Collins and James L. Traylor, who recently published the first book-length study: *One Lonely Knight: Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, $8.95 paperback, $19.95 hardcover).

The book covers all Spillane's novels, as well as his short stories, comic strips, and films. There's even some information about several unpublished Spillane works. The illustrated volume will certainly appeal to Spillane fans, and even those who only know Mike Hammer through the current television series will find it of interest.

SAYERS AS PLAYWRIGHT: Students of Dorothy L. Sayers are aware that she abandoned detective fiction for the writing of religious dramas and other works. During a transition period in the mid-1930s she collaborated with Muriel St. Clare Byrne on *Busman's Honeymoon,* a play about Lord Peter Wimsey that formed the basis for her final detective novel of the same title. The play has now been reprinted, along with *Love All,* a feminist drawing-room comedy by Sayers alone, which is being published for the first time. The volume has an informative Introduction by Sayers biographer Alzina Stone Dale. *Love All & Busman's Honeymoon* by Dorothy L. Sayers is available from Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio 44242, at $19.95.

EDGAR DINNER: This year's annual Edgar Awards dinner of the Mystery Writers of America will be held Friday, May 10th at New York's Sheraton Centre Hotel.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Academy Chicago is launching a series of mystery anthologies containing novelettes and short novels by leading writers. The series is being edited by Bill Pronzini and Martin H. Greenberg.

Due this month from Knopf is the latest Travis McGee novel, *The Lonely Silver Rain* by John D. MacDonald.

Coming in March from Arbor House is Gerald Browne's new thriller about diamond thieves, *3031 Stone*

Ruth Rendell's latest novel, *The Tree of Hands,* will be published this spring by Pantheon.

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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Well regarded practitioners in fiction's mainstream occasionally turn to the forms of the crime or detective story. These experiments are not always successful, as the forms can be misunderstood or misapplied or just not handled with assurance. In other cases—novels by William Hjortsberg *(Falling Angel)* and William McIlvanney *(Laidlaw)* come to mind—the results are spectacularly successful and add to those forms.

Another example of the latter outcome is Randolph Stow's *The Suburbs of Hell* (Taplinger, $13.95). Brutal murders—apparently motiveless, random—shock the inhabitants of a small English seacoast city, turning trust into suspicion, conversation into verbal contest, friendship into risky relationship. Most directly affected is a group of people who gather at several pubs for their regular socializing: Harry Ufford, a retired sailor; Frank DeVere, something of a businessman; Eddystone Eva, a lady of mature years who lives alone in a lighthouse; and Sam, a black taxi driver. Stow captures the setting and people magnificently, the dialogue rings with dialect and authenticity, and the narrative absolutely chills to the marrow.

Bartholomew Gill takes a more oblique approach than usual in his latest about Dublin's Inspector Peter McGarr, but repays the extra reader attentiveness in the end with a deeply felt tale of north and south in Ireland. This is *McGarr and the Method of Descartes* (Viking, $14.95), which brings the inspector into the affair when unauthorized computer use results in murder. But the beginnings are much earlier, in 1971, when a newsman, a son of Belfast gone to London, returns and loses everything to the pain and intolerance that is Northern Ireland. He hides his agony and rage and begins to plan; what unfolds bids fair to cost McGarr both career and life.

Michael Delahaye's sympathies are with the Israelis in his *On the Third Day* (Macmillan, $15.95). We journey a few years into the future. The U.S. president is a hardnosed S.O.B. with a mind to force Israel to return land won in 1967. But Israeli archaeologists have found the skeleton of a First Century crucifixion victim which might convincingly be represented as an unresurrected Jesus. The Vatican is devastated, U.S. leverage disappears, and the bungling CIA hatches a plot to neutralize the bones. An absorbing, carefully constructed tale.

London, 1890, comes vibrantly alive in Ray Harrison's first novel, *Why Kill Arthur Potter* (Scribners, $11.95). A humble clerk for a shipping company is waylaid in an al-

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ley, and the case belongs to Detective Sergeant Joseph Bragg. But he's lumbered with a new subordinate, a most uncommon copper—wealthy and educated Constable Morton. Bragg thinks the weight of the man will pull him down. But not so, for Morton's way with women and his fluency in French help uncover what's stewing away beneath the Cross Shipping Company. I'd like more of Bragg and Morton.

Its technology is not credible, but otherwise the second adventure of CIA agent Richard Owen is a fine and fanciful intrigue yarn. This is *Falseface* by Marilyn Sharp (St. Martin's, $15.95), which divides its time between Washington, D.C. and Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. Terrorists capture several congressmen when they seize an ancient Mayan ruin. Also in the net is Owen, there by coincidence. Or perhaps not. The weak and accidental U.S. President gets conflicting advice from his several advisors and impossible demands from the terrorists—whose nationalities seem not to be Mexican. What does this have to do with a CIA agent turned professional assassin, just released from a prison in Indiana? Wheels within bloody wheels again. . .

Neither its crimes (knife butchery mixed with sexual perversion) nor its conversations (profane) are enjoyable, yet *Bleeding Hearts* by Teri White (Mysterious Press, $14.95) moves with significant power and authority. "Spaceman" Kowalski, an L.A. cop whose partnerships don't last long, is paired with Blue Maguire, rich with inherited wealth and a cop because he likes it—or used to. An escaped psychopath, previously nabbed by Kowalski, begins with his emotionally dependent brother to entertain himself with young male prostitutes, while plotting his revenge on Spaceman.

Dorothy Cannell, English born but now living in Illinois, debuts with *The Thin Woman* (St. Martin's, $13.95), set in her native countryside and delightfully overflowing with old-fashioned charm and humor. Ellie Simons, fat and bereft of suitors, is invited to the ancestral mansion for a reunion. To preserve her pride in the face of the family, particularly the beauteous Vanessa, over whom all men salivate, Ellie retains a "fiancé"—a pornographer who moonlights through an escort service. To Merlin's Court they go, where Ellie finds she's an heiress—*if* she'll lose 63 pounds, *if* her escort will write a book-length work of unrelieved chastity, *if* they find the treasure hidden at Court—and all this in six months.

Naturally other family members—a loathsome lot, generally—enthusiastically wish her failure, and might, in a pinch, be willing to kill to ensure that.

The paperback reprinters have been serving us exceedingly well of late, with an abundance of riches too great to list completely here. Focusing on publishers perhaps less widely distributed, look for *Death-Watch* and *The Four False Weapons* by John Dickson Carr from Collier ($3.50 each); *The Rasp*

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by Philip MacDonald, *The Curse of the Bronze Lamp* by Carter Dickson, *In a Lonely Place* by Dorothy B. Hughes, and *Rebecca's Pride* by Donald McNutt Douglas from Carroll & Graf ($3.50 each); *Halo for Satan* and *Halo in Blood* by John Evans, plus *The Deep End* by Fredric Brown and *The Killer Inside Me* by Jim Thompson from Quill/Morrow ($3.50 each); *Maigret at the Coroner's* and *Maigret Afraid* by Georges Simenon from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich ($3.95 each); *The Naked Runner* by Francis Clifford and *An Afternoon To Kill* by Shelley Smith ($4.95 each), along with *Escape* by Ethel Vance ($7.95) from Academy Chicago; *Hindsight* and *The Old English Peep Show* by Peter Dickinson, plus *Keystone* by Peter Lovesey and *The Night of the Generals* by Hans Helmut Kirst from Pantheon ($2.95 each); *The Kennel Murder Case* by S. S. Van Dine and *The Bone Is Pointed* by Arthur W. Upfield from Scribners ($3.95 each); *A Bullet in the Ballet* by Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon, *The Detections of Dr. Sam: Johnson* by Lillian de la Torre, and *The Friend* by Margaret Millar from International Polygonics ($5.00 each); *Treasure by Degrees* and *Unholy Writ* by David Williams, plus *He Done Her Wrong, Never Cross a Vampire,* and *High Midnight* by Stuart Kaminsky from Mysterious Press ($3.95 each); and, finally, two double volumes of E. Phillips Oppenheim novels from Leete's Island Books, *The Wrath To Come* with *The Great Impersonation* and *Gabriel Samara, Peacemaker* with *Mr. Billingham, the Marquis, and Madelon* ($8.95 each).

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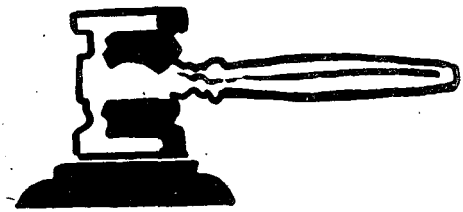

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DETECTIVERSE

THE NO-PER-CENT SOLUTION

by HELEN THILENIUS

"This time," the police said, "we'll go by the book
And have Holmes and Poirot take a masterly look."
They got quite a production
Of brilliant deduction—
But each named a different crook!

© 1984 by Helen Thilenius.

THIS LITTLE PIGGY . . .

by JANET E. KEARIN

Watson played "This pig went to market"
With a child who to visit him came.
"This is all new to me," observed Sherlock;
"I didn't know that the foot was a game."

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ELEMENTARY

by THOMAS C. DUDDY

"Look at this, Holmes," called Watson with a shout,
"The victim's had his teeth all knocked out!
He's been shot and stabbed, and I think poisoned, too,
And note he's been strangled—he's turning quite blue!
From his back there protrudes a handle of bone,
From his front there's a spear someone's rudely thrown!
His head indicates he was marlinespiked!"
"I deduce, my dear Watson, he was not well liked."

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

"Mr. Brant," Geoffrey Avalon began the questioning, "how do you justify your existence?"

Brant smiled ruefully. "As a lawyer, I don't think I can. You know the old joke, perhaps, of the time God threatened to sue Satan, and Satan answered, 'How can you? I've got all the lawyers.' In my defense, however, I'm not the kind of lawyer who plays tricks in front of a judge and jury. Mostly I sit in my office and try to write documents that actually mean what they are supposed to mean."

Avalon said, "In the earlier discussion you said that homonyms are ambiguities that could cause trouble. Does that mean you have run into homonyms professionally, in your preparation of contracts, that brought about unexpected complications . . . ?"

THE FOURTH HOMONYM

by ISAAC ASIMOV

"Homonyms!" said Nicholas Brant. He was Thomas Trumbull's guest at the monthly banquet of the Black Widowers. He was rather tall and had surprisingly prominent bags under his eyes despite the comparative youthfulness of his appearance otherwise. His face was thin and smooth-shaven, and his brown hair showed as yet no signs of grey. "Homonyms," he said.

"What?" said Mario Gonzalo blankly.

"The words you call 'soundalikes.' The proper name for them is 'homonyms.' "

"That so?" said Gonzalo. "How do you spell it?"

Brant spelled it.

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Emmanuel Rubin looked at Brant owlishly through the thick lenses of his glasses. He said, "You'll have to excuse Mario, Mr. Brant. He is a stranger to our language."

Gonzalo brushed some specks of dust from his jacket sleeve and said, "Manny is corroded with envy because I've invented a word-game. He knows the words but he lacks any spark of inventiveness, and that kills him."

"Surely Mr. Rubin doesn't lack inventiveness," said Brant soothingly. "I've read some of his books."

"I rest my case," said Gonzalo. "Anyway, I'm willing to call my game Homonyms instead of Soundalikes. The thing is to make up some short situation which can be described by two words that are soundalikes—that are homonyms. I'll give you an example. If the sky is perfectly clear, it's easy to decide to go on a picnic in the open. If it's raining cats and dogs, it's easy to decide *not* to go on a picnic. But what if it's cloudy and the forecast is for possible showers but there seem to be patches of blue here and there so you can't make up your mind about the picnic? What would you call that?"

"A stupid story," said Trumbull tartly, passing his hand over his crisply waved white hair.

"Come on," said Gonzalo, "play the game. The answer is two words that sound alike."

There was a general silence and Gonzalo said, "The answer is 'whether weather.' It's the kind of weather where you wonder whether to go on a picnic or not. 'Whether weather'—don't you get it?"

James Drake stubbed out his cigarette and said, "We get it. The question is, how do we get rid of it?"

Roger Halsted said, in his soft voice, "Pay no attention, Mario. It's a reasonable parlor game, except that there don't seem to be many combinations you can use."

Geoffrey Avalon looked down austerely from his 72-inch height and said, "More than you might think. Suppose you owned a castrated ram that was frisky on clear days and miserable on rainy days. If it were merely cloudy, however, you might wonder whether that ram would be frisky or miserable. That would be 'whether wether weather.' "

There came a chorus of outraged "Whats?"

Avalon said, "The first word is w-h-e-t-h-e-r, meaning 'if.' The middle word is w-e-t-h-e-r, meaning 'a castrated ram.' The last word is w-e-a-t-h-e-r, which refers to atmospheric conditions."

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"I repeat," growled Trumbull, "this is a stupid game."

"It doesn't have to be a game," said Brant. "Lawyers are but too aware of the ambiguities built into the language, and homonyms can cause trouble."

The gentle voice of Henry, that waiter-for-all-seasons, made itself heard over the hubbub by some alchemy that worked only for him. "Gentlemen," he said, "I regret the necessity of interrupting a warm discussion, but dinner is being served."

"Here's another one," said Gonzalo over the smoked trout. "Someone has written down all the digits and on all of them but one he has drawn a very clever face. A child watching this is delighted, but dissatisfied with the incompleteness of the project. What does he say?"

Halsted, who was spreading the horseradish sauce daintily over his trout, said, "The child says, 'Do that to two, too.' "

Gonzalo said in an aggrieved manner, "Have you heard that somewhere before?"

"No," said Halsted, "but what's the use of teaching mathematics if I can't solve problems involving the number two?"

Gonzalo frowned. "You're trying to be funny, aren't you, Roger?"

Trumbull said, "As host of the evening, I would like to recommend that we change the subject."

No one gave any sign of hearing. Avalon said, "Homonyms are usually the result of the accidents of language history. For instance, 'night,' by which I mean the opposite of day, is cognate to the German, 'Nacht,' while 'knight,' by which I mean a warrior of the Table Round, is cognate with the German 'Knecht.' In English, the vowels change and the 'k' is invariably silent in an initial 'kn', so you end up with two words pronounced in identical fashion."

"The initial 'kn' doesn't invariably have a silent 'k'," said Rubin. "There are some words not yet sufficiently anglicized. I have a Jewish friend who married a young lady of the Gentile persuasion. Anxious to please her new husband, she bought some ethnic delicacies for him which she displayed proudly. Listing her purchases, she said, 'And I also bought you this nish,' and was quite puzzled when he broke into laughter."

Drake said, "I don't get it."

Rubin said, with a touch of impatience, "The word is 'knish'—with the 'k' heavily pronounced. It is a ball of dough in whose interior one places spiced mashed potatoes, or possibly some other filling,

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with the whole then being fried or baked. Any New Yorker should know that."

Trumbull sighed and said, "Well, if you can't lick them, join them. Can anyone give me a group of four homonyms, four words all pronounced alike, with spelling and meaning different in each case? I'll give you five minutes, in which I expect blessed silence."

The five minutes passed pleasantly enough, with only the sound of cracking lobster shells impinging upon the eardrums, and then Trumbull said, "I'll give you one of the words: 'right,' meaning the opposite of left. What are the other three?"

Halsted said, his mouth fairly full of lobster claw, "There's 'write' meaning to inscribe words, and 'rite' meaning a fixed religious procedure, but I don't think there's a fourth."

Avalon said, "Yes, there is. It's 'wright'—w-r-i-g-h-t, meaning a mechanic."

"That's archaic," protested Gonzalo.

"Not entirely," said Avalon. "We still speak of a playwright, who would be someone who constructs plays."

Brant said, "My friend Tom mentioned 'right,' defining it as the opposite of left. What about right meaning the opposite of wrong, and right meaning perpendicular? Would that be a fifth and sixth homonym?"

"No," said Gonzalo. "The spelling has to be different for the words to be homonyms."

Avalon said, "Not always, Mario. Two words can be spelled the same but have different meanings and have different etymological origins and they would count as homonyms. For instance, 'bear' meaning the animal and bear meaning 'to carry' have the same spelling and pronunciation but have different origins, so I would call them homonyms—along with 'bare' meaning unclothed, of course. The different uses of 'right,' however, as in right hand, right answer, and right angle all stem from the same root with the same meaning, so they would not be homonyms."

There were fifteen additional minutes before Trumbull felt justified in rattling his spoon against the water glass and bringing the conversation to a halt.

"I have never been so glad," he said, "at any of the banquets of the Black Widowers to put an end to a conversation. If I had absolute power as a host, I would fine Mario five dollars for starting it."

"You took part in it, Tom," said Gonzalo.

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"In self-defense—and shut up," said Trumbull. "I would like to present my guest, Nicholas Brant. And, Jeff, you seem civilized, even if you were more homonymized than anyone else, so would you do the honors and begin the grilling?"

Avalon's formidable eyebrows lifted and he said, "I scarcely think that 'homonymized' is English, Tom." Then, turning to the guest, he said, "Mr. Brant, how do you justify your existence?"

Brant smiled ruefully. "As a lawyer, I don't think I can. You know the old joke, perhaps, of the time God threatened to sue Satan, and Satan answered, 'How can you? I've got all the lawyers.' In my defense, however, I'm not the kind of lawyer who plays tricks in front of a judge and jury. Mostly I sit in my office and try to write documents that actually mean what they are supposed to mean."

Avalon said, "I'm a patent lawyer myself, so I ask the following question without evil intent. Do you ever try to write them so that they *don't* mean what they're supposed to mean? Do you try to build in loopholes?"

Brant said, "Naturally, I try to draw up a document that leaves my client as much freedom of action as possible, and the other side as little freedom of action as possible. However, the other side has a lawyer, too, who is working hard for the reverse, and the usual result is that the contract ends up reasonably iron-bound in both directions."

Avalon paused, then said, "In the earlier discussion you said that homonyms are ambiguities that could cause trouble. Does that mean you have run into homonyms professionally, in your preparation of contracts, that brought about unexpected complications?"

Brant raised both hands. "No, no—nothing like that. What I had in mind when I made that statement was completely irrelevant to the subject now under discussion."

Avalon ran his finger around the rim of his water glass. "You must understand, Mr. Brant, that this is not a legal cross-examination. There is no particular subject under discussion, and nothing is irrelevant. I repeat my question."

Brant remained silent for a moment, then he said, "It's something that took place a little over twenty years ago, and that I've thought about only very occasionally since then. Mr. Gonzalo's game of homonyms brought it to mind, but it's nothing. It doesn't involve any legal problems or any complications whatever. It's just a—puzzle. It's an insoluble matter that probably isn't worth discussing."

"Is it confidential?" put in Gonzalo. "Because if it is—"

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"Nothing confidential about it," said Brant. "Nothing secret, nothing sensitive—and therefore nothing interesting."

Gonzalo said, "Anything that's insoluble is interesting. Don't you agree, Henry?"

Henry, who was filling the brandy glasses, said, "I find it so when there is at least room for speculation, Mr. Gonzalo."

Gonzalo began, "Well, then, if—"

Avalon said, "Mario, let me continue, please. —Mr. Brant, I wonder if you could give us the details of this insoluble puzzle of yours. We would greatly appreciate hearing it."

"You'll be very disappointed."

"That's a chance we will take."

"Well, then," said Brant, "if you'll just give me a chance to think back—" He rested his face in one hand, thinking, while the six Black Widowers watched him expectantly and Henry took his usual place by the sideboard.

Brant said, "Let me begin with Alfred Hunzinger. He was a poor boy of an immigrant family, and he had no education worth mentioning. I'm pretty sure he never went to high school. By the time he was fourteen, he was working. Those were the decades before World War I and education was by no means considered one's birthright, or even particularly desirable for what used to be called workingmen.

"Hunzinger wasn't your usual workingman, however. He was incredibly industrious and incredibly intelligent. Intelligence and education don't necessarily go hand in hand, you know."

Rubin said, forcefully, "Indeed, they don't. I've known some very thoroughly educated jackasses."

"Hunzinger was the reverse," said Brant. "He was a very thoroughly uneducated business genius. He had a green thumb, but it was the green of dollar bills. Whatever he touched prospered, and he built a formidable business before he died.

"But this wasn't enough for him. He always felt keenly his lack of education, and he embarked in a program of home study. It wasn't continuous, for his business was his first preoccupation and there were periods when he had little time. And it was spotty, for he read promiscuously and without outside guidance. Conversation with him was an exposure to a curious mixture of pedantry and naïveté."

Avalon said, "You knew him personally, I take it."

Brant said, "Not really. Not intimately. I did some work for him. Mainly, I prepared his will. This, when properly done, and when

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there are complex business matters to consider, takes a long time and produces a long document. Periodically, it must be updated or revised and the wording considered carefully in the light of continually changing tax laws. Believe me, it was virtually a career in itself and I was forced to spend many hours in conference with him and to engage in extensive correspondence, too. However, it was a very limited and specialized relationship. I got to know the nature of his finances rather thoroughly, but to know him as a person only superficially."

"Did he have children?" asked Halsted.

"Yes, he did," said Brant. "He married late in life—at the age of forty-two, if I remember correctly. His wife was considerably younger. The marriage, while not idyllically happy, was a successful one. There was no divorce nor any prospect of one at any time, and Mrs. Hunzinger died only about five years ago. They had four children, three boys and a girl. The girl married well; she's still alive, still married, has children of her own, and is, and has been, very comfortably off. She scarcely figured in the will. Some investments were turned over to her during Hunzinger's lifetime and that was it.

"The business was left on an equal basis, one-third each, to the three sons, whose names were Frank, Mark, and Luke."

"In that order of age?" asked Drake.

"Yes. The oldest was, to use his legal signature, B. Franklin Hunzinger. The middle son is Mark David Hunzinger. The youngest son is Luke Lynn Hunzinger. Naturally, I pointed out to Hunzinger that to leave his business in equal shares to his three sons was asking for trouble. The income might be divided equally, but the directing power, the decision-making power, had to be placed in the hands of one.

"He was very stubbornly resistant to that, however. He said he had brought up his sons in accordance with the ideals of the old Roman republic and that they were all faithful to him, the paterfamilias—he actually used the term, to my intense surprise—and to each other. There would be no trouble at all, he said.

"I took the liberty of pointing out that they might well be ideal sons while he was alive and with his forceful personality directing affairs but that after he was gone hidden rivalries might show up. Never, he insisted, never. I thought him blind, and wondered how anyone so alive to any hint of chicanery in business affairs, so re-

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alistic in matters of the world, could be so foolishly romantic where his own family was concerned."

Drake said, "What was the daughter's name?"

"Claudia Jane," said Brant. "I don't remember her married name at the moment. Why do you ask?"

"Just curious. She might have had ambitions, too, mightn't she?"

"I don't think so. At least not with respect to the business. She made it quite clear she neither expected nor wanted any share in it. Her husband was rich—old money, social position, that sort of thing. The last thing she wanted was to be identified with what was, in a manner of speaking, a giant hardware store."

"Well, I see that," said Drake.

"I must admit that the family seemed entirely harmonious," said Brant. "I met the sons at one time and another, singly and together, and they seemed fine young men, much at ease with one another and obviously fond of their father. It apparently seemed appropriate to them to invite me to the festivities celebrating the old man's eightieth birthday. It was on that occasion that Hunzinger had the heart attack that carried him off. It was not entirely unexpected. He'd had a heart condition for years, but it was totally unfortunate for it to happen on his birthday.

"He was set down gently on the nearest couch and doctors were called in. The party broke up, of course. There was a kind of hushed pandemonium, but the confusion was sufficient for me to be able to stay on. It may sound ghoulish, but I conceived myself to have a job to do. He had not yet assigned any son to be the head of the firm. It was too late to have anything in writing, but if he were to say something it might have some force.

"The sons, I suppose, didn't know what I had in mind. Their mother, half in shock, had been led away. No one seemed to notice I was present. I leaned across to the old man's ear and said, 'Which of your sons is to be the head of the firm, Mr. Hunzinger?'

"It was too late. His eyes were closed, his breathing was stertorous. I wondered if he had heard me. A doctor approached and I knew he'd stop me, so I tried again quickly. This time the dying man's eyelids fluttered and his lips moved as though he were trying to speak. However, only one sound came out. It seemed to be the word 'to.' I heard nothing else. He lingered on for another hour but never said another word and died without regaining consciousness. —And that's it."

Gonzalo said, "What happened to the business?"

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"Nothing," said Brant, with what seemed the residuum of a vast surprise. "The old man was right. The three sons get along famously. It's a sort of triumvirate. When a decision must be made, they get together and come to one quickly. It's really amazing—if that sort of thing should become infectious, lawyers would all starve to death."

"Then it doesn't matter what the old man said, does it?" said Gonzalo.

"Not in the least, except that for a while it roused my curiosity. What was he trying to say?"

Drake fingered his small grey mustache. "You can't do much with the word 'to.' "

"It's worse than that," said Brant. "Which homonym? Was it t-o, t-o-o, or t-w-o?"

Trumbull said, "Might it not have been a word, Nick? Suppose he were saying a longer word such as 'constitution.' That's four syllables and he managed to sound only the third."

"Maybe," said Brant. "I can't prove that that's not so. Just the same, at the time I got the impression it was a word. I suppose I was desperately trying to read his lips and he might have said 'Headship to so-and-so' and all I got was the 'to.' Which leaves me with nothing. Of course, as I said, it doesn't matter. The sons are doing well." He shook his head. "Still, I'm a lawyer and it bothers me. Even if he were saying 'Not to anyone,' he would have been expressing his last wish and that would have been better than just falling into a situation by default. So for a while I kept wondering, and now you've put it back in my head I'll keep on wondering for another while. —And getting nowhere because there's nowhere to be gotten."

A heavy silence descended about the table, one which was finally broken by Gonzalo who said, "At least it's an interesting version of the game of Homonyms. Which of the soundalikes was it?"

Trumbull said, "What's the difference? Not one of the three would help us make sense of what the old man was trying to say."

"I told you," said Brant glumly. "It's an insoluble problem. There just isn't enough information."

"We don't have to *solve* it," said Halsted, "since there's no crisis that has to be eased, or criminal on whom we must visit retribution. All we have to do is point out a reasonable possibility to ease your mind. For instance, suppose he was saying t-w-o?"

"Well, suppose he was?" said Avalon.

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"Then it may be that he was saying something like, 'Give it to son number two.' "

Brant shook his head, and said, "The impression I got was that the to or too or two I heard was in the middle of the message. His lips moved before and after I heard it."

Rubin said, "I'm not sure you can go by that. His lips were scarcely under control. Some of what appeared to be movement might have been only trembling."

"Which makes it all the worse," said Brant.

"Now wait a while," said Halsted. "My idea works even with the word in the middle of the message. It could have been something like 'Number two son gets it.' "

Trumbull growled, "Charlie Chan might say it, but was Hunzinger likely to do so? —Nick, did you ever hear this man refer to his children by number."

"No," said Brant, "I don't think I ever did."

"Well, then," said Trumbull, "why on earth should he start doing so on his death-bed?"

"Consider this," said Rubin. "His second son is named Mark, which is also the name of the writer of the second gospel. His third son is named Luke, which is the name of the writer of the third gospel. I'll bet that if he had had a fourth son, that son's name would have been John."

"What's the good of a bet like that?" said Gonzalo. "We can't ever settle it and decide on a winner."

"Why wasn't the first son's name Matthew, then?" asked Avalon.

Rubin said, "Maybe old Hunzinger didn't think of it till after the first son was born. Maybe he simply didn't like 'Matthew.' Anyway, it strikes me that if the word *were* 't-w-o,' it would have a double meaning. It would refer to the second son *and* the second gospel and it would mean Mark in either case."

Trumbull said, "There could be a million reasons why the number two might point to Mark, but put them all together and they wouldn't be any more likely to get him to refer to 'my number two son' than just one reason would. Why wouldn't he just say 'Mark' if he meant Mark?"

Brant said, "Well, he might have said 'to Mark' at that and all I heard was 'to.' "

Avalon said, "Mr. Brant, I wonder if you at any time noted that old Mr. Hunzinger trusted one of his sons more than another—valued

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more highly the business acumen of a particular son, loved one more?"

Brant bent his head in thought. Then he shook it. "I can't say I did."

Gonzalo said, "We keep talking about the sons. How do you know the old man didn't give some thought to his daughter? Suppose he left the business to his three sons, in thirds, but wanted his daughter to make crucial decisions. He might have thought she had the best business sense and should run the show even though she wouldn't want to be connected with the business in any open way."

"What gives you that idea, Mario?" asked Avalon.

"Suppose the word was t-o-o? He might have been saying, 'My daughter, too, should be involved.' Something like that."

"I don't think so," said Brant. "Mr. Hunzinger never mentioned his daughter in connection with the business. And he was brought up before World War I, when women couldn't even vote. In no way was he a feminist. His wife was strictly a homebody and that's the way he liked it. He took care to have his daughter marry a rich man, and as far as he was concerned that was the limit of his responsibility toward her. At least, I am forced to that conclusion as I think of our various discussions of the will."

Again there fell a silence around the table, and finally Avalon said with a rather theatrical sigh, "It doesn't matter what hypotheses we set forward. No matter how clever and ingenious they might be, there's no way we can know that they are true. I'm afraid this once we'll have to agree that our guest is correct and that the problem, by its very nature, is insoluble."

Gonzalo said, "Not until we ask Henry."

"Henry?" said Brant in surprise. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Do you mean the waiter?"

Trumbull said, "No need to whisper, Nick. He's a member of the club."

"So I'll ask him," said Gonzalo. "Henry, do you have any ideas about this?"

From his place at the sideboard Henry smiled very slightly and said, "I must admit, Mr. Gonzalo, that I've been wondering what the first name of the eldest son might be."

Gonzalo said, "It's Frank. Don't you remember?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Gonzalo, but I seem to recall the oldest son is B. Franklin Hunzinger. I wondered what the B stood for."

All eyes turned to Brant, who shrugged and said, "He's identified

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as B. Franklin even in his father's will. That's the legal form of his signature. I always assumed, however, that the B stood for Benjamin."

"It's a natural assumption," said Henry. "Any American named B. Franklin, it would seem, would be bound to be a Benjamin. But did you ever hear any member of the family, or anyone for that matter, address him as Benjamin or Ben?"

Slowly, Brant shook his head. "I don't recall any such incident, but it was over twenty years ago and I was not really part of the family circle."

"Or since the death of the elder Hunzinger?"

"I've rarely had any contact with them at all since then, not even with respect to legal matters."

Trumbull said, "What's all this about, Henry?"

"Why, it occurred to me that there are, in a manner of speaking, four homonyms with the sound t-o-o."

Avalon said, in an astonished voice, "Four? You mean that one of the homonyms has two meanings of unrelated derivation as in the case of b-e-a-r?"

"No, Mr. Avalon. I am referring to four homonyms with four different spellings."

Avalon thought briefly. "Impossible, Henry. Manny, can you think of a fourth homonym beyond t-o, t-o-o, and t-w-o."

"No," said Rubin flatly. "There is no fourth homonym."

Henry said, "I said 'in a manner of speaking.' It all depends on the first name of B. Franklin."

Drake said, "Henry, you're being mysterious and you've got us all confused. Now *explain*."

"Yes, Dr. Drake. Mr. Brant said that the elder Hunzinger was self-educated, and he indicated that he was particularly interested in Roman history. He raised his children in what he thought was the Roman tradition. He used terms such as 'paterfamilias.' And he gave his children traditional Roman names. His daughter he named Claudia. One son is Mark, from the Roman Marcus, another is Luke from the Roman Lucius.

"It is possible, in fact, that the original names were indeed Marcus and Lucius and that the youngsters found Mark and Luke more palatable to their peers. What if the eldest had a Roman name also, which had no common anglicized form? He might not have used it at all, but stayed with Franklin, which became the very common and acceptable Frank.

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"One common Roman name beginning with B is Brutus, and that has no anglicized form that is likely to be acceptable."

"Aha," said Rubin.

"Yes, Mr. Rubin," said Henry. "If the elder Mr. Hunzinger had picked up scraps of Latin, undoubtedly Julius Caesar's last words, one of the most famous of all Latin phrases, would be known to him. It contains the word 'tu,' which is Latin for the familiar form of 'you,' and is so well known among educated English-speaking people—if only from this phrase—that it might almost rank as a fourth homonym.

"Asked about which of his sons should head the firm, the dying man thought of the oldest, remembered the name he had given him as a child, and may have said something like 'All my sons share and you, Brutus, will lead.' The phrase 'and you, Brutus,' becomes the muttered Caesarian exclamation of 'et tu, Brute,' and only the 'tu' was loud enough to hear."

"Good God," muttered Brant, "who could possibly think of something like that?"

"But it's *most* ingenious," said Avalon. "I hope you're right, Henry. I'd hate to see that reasoning wasted. I suppose we could call Hunzinger and try to persuade him to give us his first name."

Gonzalo said excitedly, "Wait, Jeff, wouldn't it be in *Who's Who in America*? They usually include businessmen."

Avalon said, "They might well have only the legal version of his name—B. Franklin Hunzinger. Of course, they sometimes include the name beyond the period in parentheses to indicate it exists but is not to be used."

"Let's see," said Gonzalo. He took down the first volume of the tome and for a few moments there was the sound of flipping pages. Then it stopped and Gonzalo cried out in triumph, "Brutus Franklin Hunzinger, the r-u-t-u-s in parentheses."

Brant buried his head in his hands. "Twenty years, on and off, this has bothered me, and if I had looked him up in *Who's Who*—" He shook his head. "I must tell them. They will have to know."

Henry said, "I don't think that would be wise, Mr. Brant. They get along well as it is, and if they find out that their father had chosen one of them to head the firm—which even as it is we can't be *certain* of—bad feelings might break out. Surely one shouldn't attempt to fix what isn't broken."

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For a while the children stood quietly on the granite slope behind the chalk line, watching the fast tidewater in its perpetual nudging of the rockweed. The water streamed the weed out in a brown fringe. As though trying to escape from the anchoring rock, the coarse tentacles writhed and twined . . .

THE CHALK LINE

by RYERSON JOHNSON

Scalped smooth by glaciers in the last ice age, the grey granite sloped gently down to Fundy tidewater. The slope was the only thing gentle around here. Frigid sea water in the tidal current swept past the rock, streaming out the seaweed and tilting a bell buoy in the channel.

The boy on the sloping rock stared hard at that deep swirl of water. "Is he watching?"

"Yes."

"Good. Don't ever let him know we're watching *him*, Lynn."

"You don't have to tell me."

The boy answered his sister with a quick move and a deliberate push with both hands. She slipped on the smooth rock and fell. Arms flailing, shoes scraping, she slid down the granite slope into the fast-moving water.

It was the same everywhere along this part of the Maine coast. Near the low-tide line, dingy yellow seaweed grew in profusion—rooted firmly into the rock. So the girl did not remain long in the icy water. Her spread fingers raked into the seaweed and held on as the tidewater streamed her legs out. Quickly then, she reached for a fingerhold in a crack in the sloping granite and pulled herself out.

Laughing, back up on top of the rock, her jeans and shirt dripping water, she made a rowdy grab for her brother.

"Cut it, Lynn! Quit! You're getting me wet."

"I'm getting *you* wet! *I* can't get any wetter—I'm going in again."

"Let's both at the same time. I'll push you and you push me."

They pushed and pulled at each other. Both fell on the sloping

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rock and slid with a splash into the water. Their hands grabbed the waving rockweed and held on. They grinned at each other and kicked their feet derisively at the fast water trying to pull them away.

The girl put her face close to her brother's ear. "Can you see? Is he still watching?"

The boy moved his head to give his eyes a quick sweep of the spruce underbrush crowding the shore and on to the house beyond. "I think so," he said conspiratorially.

"Ugh, it's cold! Give me a push out, then I'll pull you up."

From the direction of the house, a woman's frantic screaming sounded. Running feet crunched the beach gravel on the path that led between spruces to the shore. A woman in obvious anguish burst into close view. She stopped at the place where the rock sloped down.

Seeing them, she shouted in a panic, "Come here! This minute! Do you hear? How often must I tell you?"

"Aw, Mom—"

"You could be drowned! This is some of the most dangerous water on the whole Maine coast!"

"Gee, Mom—we know how to swim."

"No one can swim in these waters!" Her frightened eyes lifted to take in the tidal current sucking past offshore ledges. In the near distance, a herring boat made slow progress, butting through the tide. "This water's too fast and too cold. Nobody can live in it. You know that."

They did know it. Most of the children who lived here the year round never learned to swim. The water was too cold. When they grew up and went with their fathers to work the herring or the lobster boats, there was this constant occupational hazard. If they fell off a boat, that was the end of it. Their heavy clothing, the swift currents working in and out between islands and ledges, and the cold water, varying only a few degrees summer and winter, accomplished its deadly work within minutes. It happened to a few every summer.

He appeared so silently, not a smidgen of sound in the gravel under his soft-soled shoes. The children looked up and there he was in his designer slacks and English tweed jacket. A young man—younger than their mother—with a face dark, handsome, brooding. Charming when he smiled. His black hair lay in a controlled wave across his forehead. He was standing now beside their mother, a suggestion of possessiveness in his manner. It was a pos-

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ture that was never wholly absent from him, and that translated eloquently to the children.

Their mother's hand reached out for his, but her attention remained on them. "You run in and get some dry clothes on." But as they started dutifully along the path to the house, she called them back and turned, distraught, to the young man. "Mark—that piece of carpenter's chalk you had yesterday when we were hanging the pictures, do you have it?"

Mark's hand dug into a jacket pocket. He brought out a piece of chalk and handed it to her.

"Thank you, dear."

The children took note of her words and tone; she was always trying to please him. While they watched, she bent and backed along, drawing a firm chalk line across the rock where the slope began to steepen. Then she straightened and fixed her stare on the children. "Don't go beyond this chalk line ever again. Not ever! Now, go ahead and get out of those wet clothes."

On the way along the landscaped path where flowering impatiens grew in colorful profusion between the evergreens, the girl stopped and looked back, then turned and ran with her brother to the house.

Their mother locked fingers with the young man as she stood staring down at the yellow rockweed roiling in the current. With an involuntary shudder, she pressed in against him. "I'll never get used to these black waters, Mark. I lived too long in Indiana, I guess. There the water is placid and cows stand in it up to their knees. But my husband was born here—"

"I understand." In a consoling gesture, he tightened his arm around her.

"Before he died, I tried to like it here for his sake. I did try! But I worry about the children every minute. I think this is the last summer I'll open the house."

Anchored into his own thoughts, he wasn't listening. "Your children don't like me, Connie."

She nodded, aggrieved. "I don't know what's gotten into them this summer. They seem bedeviled."

With the insinuating gentleness of the practiced lover, his arms went around her, holding her against him closely. She resisted feebly at first, an instinctive reaction, then melted into him, giving herself fully to his embrace. His mouth lowered to hers. She returned his kisses with an intensity that left her weak, then they broke apart

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and, arms around each other, walked slowly to the house. On the garden path, under the shadows of the evergreens just before emerging onto the open lawn, they paused.

"Change your mind, Connie."

She looked at him searchingly. Lithe, and with clear eyes and skin, she came across an easy ten years younger than she was. She pushed at her hair, as abundant if not as blonde as when she was twenty. "I do live for my children. You're right about that."

"But you're a person, too. You have yourself to think of."

"I only know," she said miserably, "I could never marry if it made my children unhappy."

"But I *like* children, Connie. I particularly like *your* children—they're so much a part of *you*. I watch them sometimes when they don't know, trying to understand them, trying to think of ways to reach them. Next to wanting you, I want them to return my affection—"

"I know. And you'll win them over. As you did me. Be patient."

"But patience isn't in me, Connie. I love you. I want to marry you now."

Her fingers touched his lips. "A little while longer, Mark." Her voice took on a pleading tone. "Please."

"I hate to wait. I never could stand waiting. And one more day without you is a year—"

The screen door slammed. The children ran across the porch, took the steps in two jumps, and came sprinting across the lawn. As with everything else here, the lawn was poodle-clipped to perfection, although it showed brown in spots because of the dearth of rain this summer. They stopped in front of their mother, dry, clean, and cool, ignoring Mark.

"Can we go on a lobster picnic today, Mom?" the boy wanted to know.

The girl danced around her. "Can we? Can we?"

Mark started away. "See you later, Connie." To the children he made a small flat-out wave of his hand and smiled.

"Mind your mother, Bobby—Lynn. Don't go near the water."

They watched him in his easy-flowing walk across the faded grass to the house.

Bobby said, "He wants to marry you, doesn't he, Mom?"

"Yes," Lynn said, "he does, doesn't he?"

"Are you going to, Mom? Daddy wouldn't want you to."

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"And he hates us," Lynn said. "He hates us to death. He's always watching to see what he can do to hurt us."

"And he'll hurt you, too, Mom—he's just after your money."

Shocked, their mother said, "What a thing to say! I don't know what's possessing you two this summer."

"It's true," Bobby said. "I read it in a book. When a younger man marries an older woman, it's for her money. And if he can't get it by marrying her, sometimes he gets it by killing her for the insurance. Did he ask about your insurance, Mom?"

She was aware this had been building up, but she hadn't been aware of the intensity of their feelings. "Stop it," she said sharply.

"Anyone could see it except a woman blinded by love," Bobby pressed on. "And the way he's always watching us, I can tell he's thinking how to kill us because we're in the way of his marrying you for your money. But we're not afraid of him. We could kill him before he could kill us." He was speaking in a fevered way, feeding on his own excitement, building up the story and not giving his stunned mother a chance to get a word in. "Oh, yes, we could kill him easy, so he'd better watch out. Easy because he's like you—he's afraid of the ocean. But we're not. We're like Daddy. We're friends of the ocean. We could get it to kill him for us and nobody would ever know."

His mother, grasping control now, caught the children to her. "Oh, you poor dears—you babies! You don't know what you're saying."

Later in the morning the children sat on the sloping granite rock just back of the chalk line.

Bobby's bare feet rubbed the line. "He wasn't either a friend of Daddy's."

"No, he wasn't." Lynn cuddled a large cloth doll, one she'd had almost from the first.

"I never heard Daddy even mention him."

"I didn't either."

Bobby's hand reached out, closed on a loose piece of rock. He threw it in the water and, leaning close to Lynn, asked furtively, "You think he's watching us again?"

"I think I heard the bushes crackle."

Bobby threw another rock. "Mom just met him at the party that time."

"Now he lives at our house."

"He'd starve if we didn't feed him."

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"He could get a job somewhere—"

"He never will as long as he's got Mom's money to spend." Bobby stood up and moved lazily to one side where there was a small clutter of dried seaweed and driftwood. He picked up a large piece of driftwood and carried it to the chalk line. Being careful to keep his toes behind the line, he heaved the piece of sun-greyed wood into the water. Lynn stood up with her doll and they both watched intently while the tidal current sucked the driftwood into its certain grasp and floated it away.

"Why don't you throw your doll in?" Bobby said.

Lynn hugged the doll possessively. "Are you crazy?"

Bobby grinned, said slyly, "It would prove you're big enough to get along without dolls."

"I don't have to prove it. I know I'm big enough."

"Maybe *you* know it. I don't."

"I don't care if you don't."

"Yes you do."

"Don't!" Frowning, she looked searchingly at the chalk line under her bare feet. "It's too far for me to throw it anyway."

"Then go a little closer."

"Cross the line, you mean?"

"I dare you."

She leaned close to whisper in his ear. "What if he *is* watching? And runs out when I'm close to the water and pushes me in?"

"I'd push him in if he did."

"Big help, after I'm already gone!"

She looked back with a nervous excitement at the evergreen thicket. Something about it seemed scary. There was no air stirring, but under the sun-glare the green spruce needles, some of them browned by the summer's heat, seemed to pulse and breathe. Suddenly, she clutched the doll compulsively and stepped across the line. Step by cautious step, she moved down the sloping rock. At the seaweed edge where the water streamed, she looked back at her brother, then turned to the sea again and threw the doll in. Scurrying back to stand by her brother, they watched the current carry the doll away.

To the surprise of them both, she burst out crying. "Oh, I didn't mean to do it! I don't know why I did it! I want my dolly back!" Her voice was a small, tearful child's; she was a girl holding in abeyance for a moment the process of growing up.

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Her brother, feeling guilt pangs, tried to comfort her. "We can get it back, Lynn."

Still crying, "How can we? It's gone!"

"Remember Daddy's secret?"

"What secret?"

"About this place? Anything falling into the water when the tide's going out, like now?"

She stopped crying. "That it washes ashore in Dagget's Cove, you mean?"

"That's it. Daddy tested it with all kinds of things, remember? They float in and out between the ledges, but they always end up at Dagget's Cove, a mile from here. Nobody knows that but Daddy and us."

"All right. Let's go get my doll."

From the house there was the pleasant sound of a bell.

"Lunch time," Bobby said. "We'll do it after, Lynn. Race you to the house."

The children and their mother were already at the table when Mark came in. As he settled into his chair, Lynn swapped a meaningful glance with her brother.

"Mr. Mabrey," she said, "you've got some pine needles sticking to your coat sleeve."

He shrugged. "They won't hurt anything."

Bobby said, "You wouldn't hurt anything, either, would you, Mr. Mabrey?"

Mark stared hard at Bobby. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean did you used to squash lightning bugs on the back of your hand, and like that?"

"Bobby!" his mother admonished.

"I mean when he was a child," Bobby poured it on.

"To make your hand shine at night, he means," Lynn said to Mark, looking innocent. "Of course, it kills the poor lightning bug."

"That's enough!" their mother said severely. "Oh, why do you talk like that?"

Bobby shrugged elaborately. "Mr. Mabrey looks like somebody we saw on TV the other night, that's all. The man on television did things like that. He—"

"Stop it!" Her face flushed with embarrassment and anger. "Leave the table," she ordered. "You, too, Lynn. This minute. Go!"

They got up and started to leave.

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"You can apologize first," she said sharply.

They looked at each other for reinforcement, then said it together, almost as though reciting a sing-song nursery rhyme. "We apologize, Mr. Mabrey."

The children tromped through the house and out the front door.

"Follow me," Bobby said, tight-lipped in the manner of a conspirator in a TV crime show.

"Where to?"

"I'll show you."

Lynn followed her brother into the house again by a side door and up the stairs and down the hall to Mr. Mabrey's room.

"I've got this idea," Bobby said. "You stand outside the door and watch while I go in and do something."

"Do what?"

"You'll see."

Inside the room, Bobby prowled actively around until he found a fishing pole, dismantled and in its case. He came out with the fishing pole and a sunhat. He looked inside the hat, under the sweatband. He showed Lynn.

"It's got his name there. Afraid somebody'll steal his hat—ha ha."

"Put it on," she whispered.

He put it on. She giggled. "It's too big for you."

"Yeah."

"Wear it anyway. I dare you."

"No. I better not."

"Why?"

"Somebody might see me with it. I don't want anybody to see me with it."

They tiptoed down the stairs.

"Where are we going?" Lynn whispered.

"Dagget's Cove," he whispered back. "But first we'll hide the hat and fishing pole somewhere, and wait for Mom and Mr. Mabrey to finish lunch and get away from the dining room and kitchen."

"Why?"

"It'll take a while for the tide to float your doll to Dagget's Cove. We might be gone all afternoon—"

"I get it. We might get hungry, so we'll raid the fridge before we go."

"Right."

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Lynn had a final worry. "Do you think it's all right if we leave him at home alone with mother?"

"I guess so. She's been alone with him before . . ."

Dagget's Cove was a tiny indentation on a vast and rugged coastline with high rocky sides and an apron of smooth beach gravel running down to tidewater. Fir and spruce made a green smudge at the cliff tops. Except for a dilapidated and long-unused wharf, the place wasn't much changed from when the Passamaquoddy Indians lived there.

Bobby and Lynn turned off the rutted Dagget's Cove road, pushed through a tangle of shore peas and wild gooseberry bushes, and came out on the deserted beach. On their purposeful way to the ocean's edge, they walked across rocks smoothed down to about baseball size by thousands of years of tide and wave action. There was nearly every kind of rock, raked off the whole of eastern Canada and carried here by the same glacier that had smoothed the in-place granite in front of their house.

The children picked their way between random pieces of driftwood and scuffed through windrows of soggy rockweed, marks of previous high tides. Tremendous tides prevailed on this Fundy coast—as much as thirty feet when the moon and the winds were right.

The children reached the water's edge and puddled up and down the beach in the bubbly wavewash. In a pool of matted seaweed, they found what they were looking for. Lynn held her dripping doll at arm's length and picked tentacles of seaweed from it. Salt water ran down and dripped from her elbow. For a long moment she held the soggy doll out and stared at it.

"Huh," she said, "now I've got it, it doesn't seem so much any more."

She let it drop to the sea floor.

Bobby was already trudging toward the wharf. She followed him onto it. The front end of the grey-weathered structure had long since fallen in. Green water lapped at the snaggle-toothed pilings. The children made their cautious way across the rotten flooring until they reached a gap too wide to cross, then dropped down and let their feet swing over the side.

While Lynn watched, Bobby took Mark's hat out of a crumpled supermarket bag he had been carrying. He put the hat upside-down on the wharf and weighted it there with a can of bait he had brought along. He joined the fishing pole, baited the hook, and dropped the line into the green water.

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Some time went by, and he caught a flounder. He put the pole carefully down, stood up, and stretched. "Should of known. Nothing but flounders here this time of tide. Mom won't clean flounders, and I sure don't want to. Do you, Lynn?"

She shook her head. "No."

He unhooked the flounder and tossed it over the side. "Let's go home."

"Yes," she said soberly. "We're finished here."

The next day the children were back at their favorite playing place. For a while they stood quietly on the granite slope behind the chalk line, watching the fast tidewater in its perpetual nudging of the rockweed. The water streamed the weed out in a brown fringe. As though trying to escape from the anchoring rock, the coarse tentacles writhed and twined.

The children listened while they watched.

"He's there now," Bobby whispered.

"Yes." Lynn nodded. "Like always."

In a loud voice, Bobby said, "I dare you."

Lynn put one foot across the line and drew it back.

"Ho ho—I can do better than that." Bobby put one foot across and let it stay there.

Lynn moved both feet across and stayed there. "Now what?"

"Go closer."

"Dare me?"

"Dare you."

She moved cautiously down the granite slope, taking tiny steps. Bobby moved along beside her. They kept on until they reached the water's edge, where they crouched down, dabbling their hands in the streaming rockweed.

They heard his feet lightly scuffing the granite in his approach before they heard his voice. He stopped disarmingly behind the chalk line. "Didn't your mother tell you not to go across this line?"

Without looking back, Bobby said, "Did you hear a funny voice, Lynn—like somebody talking?"

"Yes. It *was* a funny voice, wasn't it? Not quite human."

Mark moved across the line then, slowly, silently. Still, the children didn't look around. He moved close and crouched directly behind them. He swiveled his head in a furtive glance in all directions, then his hands moved suddenly out in a hard push against the

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children, one hand to each child, extending himself in the effort to where he was himself almost off balance.

He accomplished his intent. Both children fell forward into the water.

The children also accomplished their intent. Although they hadn't looked around, they had been ready for him. As they fell, they reached back to take a fierce grip on his barely balanced legs—Bobby clutching one and Lynn the other. He plunged into the water with them, a hard, windmilling fall. Gripped by the icy current, he was swept away.

The children held to the rockweed and climbed back, dripping, to shore.

"He tried to kill us!" Bobby said starkly.

"Yes, he did," Lynn said.

Later, at Dagget's Cove, a man's drowned body was discovered. Two of the locals, scrounging the beach for wrinkles—a barnaclelike shellfish—discovered it. On the ancient wharf they found a fishing pole and a sunhat.

"Looks like he was fishin' off the wharf an' fell in."

The other beachcomber, examining the hat, said, "Mark Mabrey—that's what it says in the hat." He looked up. "That's that young fella visitin' out to the Thornboro place, ain't it? You know—widder woman comes here summers with the two kids?"

After the informing call, the children's mother turned in shock from the phone.

The children did their best to comfort her.

"Poor Mr. Mabrey—"

"We'll be real good, Mom, and not do anything to bother you—"

"Or worry you about anything—"

"Like playing on the rock."

"It *is* dangerous playing there, Mom."

"We won't play there any more."

"Q"

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The wall grew by great yards at a time. Albert worked on it day after day, week after week. Ten yards, twenty, fifty, a hundred, straight across the wavy field. Vermont had plenty of stones and Albert just kept hefting them in place. Soon the wall was a giant—a yard wide, a yard high, big stones on the inside for anchorage, small stones on the sides and top for show.

The previous story was about a Maine widow. This one is about a Vermont widower. Two overcast views of the rugged setting and spirit of northern New England . . .

THE STONE WALL

by STEVE SHERMAN

Albert Koski began building the stone wall when his wife died. Debra was younger than he, some people saying at least by fifteen years, and probably she was. It was difficult to tell, because she wore her years like clean dresses and bright scarves, never out of fashion, always inviting and welcome—so different from her husband. Nobody could figure them together, but then couples were made like them in the back country, where men and women lived with fewer choices.

He started building the wall straight from her gravesite behind the sycamore she favored. At first people said that was good, he needed the release, he needed something demanding to take his mind off her. It was hard, honest labor, the Vermont kind. He worked at it in plain sight there by the road, and acquaintances (he wasn't the "friend" type) stopped by and said he was doing all right, making progress. It was good to have someone making stone walls again. It was a lost art, everybody putting up easy fences that rotted before the children grew up.

Albert said little in return. He kept digging and lifting and shifting the rocks and boulders into place. "One on two," he said. That was his method, the old-time method. One rock on two and the wall would hold—it wouldn't slip, the ice wouldn't topple it. —One rock

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on two didn't rock the wall. This was his witticism, but it usually got only silent nodding from those who heard it, and never a signal from Albert himself that he meant it to be memorable.

Those infrequent watchers stood by as he bent his hulking frame, his sweaty summer muscles still rippling and tight. No one offered help because Albert was that kind. This was his wall and it would be until it was finished. So they just watched and made a few comments now and then to show their presence.

The wall grew by great yards at a time. He worked on it day after day, week after week. Ten yards, twenty, fifty, a hundred, straight across the wavy field. Vermont had plenty of stones and Albert just kept hefting them in place. Soon the wall was a giant—a yard wide, a yard high, big stones on the inside for anchorage, small stones on the sides and top for show. In two months the wall was approaching Wesley Scott's land, and that was when the trouble started.

Albert was a worker, Wesley an inheritor. Albert worked his land, but Wesley moved in from Connecticut when his parents were killed in a plane crash at the Madrid airport. He hired help (he had plenty of money) to trim his apple orchard, paint the barn, cut the rye, keep the white house and black shutters in shape. His two roans idled through the afternoon grass, their lazy tails fluffed by the Green Mountains wind and typifying what Wesley was all about.

Those horses were irresistible to Debra, being so open-air herself. Eventually, she got to ride them, which was all right with Albert. He liked to watch her trotting far across the straw field, her black hair streaming behind like the roan's, her rhythm of exuberant symmetry gentle on the rugged backdrop of woods and rocky balds.

When people saw Debra and Wesley riding together, they didn't say much. Neither did Albert. But when she died he didn't cry, either. Instead, he buried her with perfunctory concern, lost himself in the house for a week, and then started building the wall.

Now that the wall was nearing Wesley's property line, people took particular notice. One or two would ask, "Albert, where's the wall going?"

"Up the hill," Albert would say, toss his head back in the direction, and keep right on lifting and shoving, adding up the stones.

Then the day arrived when Albert continued the wall straight across Wesley's line, straight into his field. It was a peculiar sight because Wesley's line was a stone wall, too. Albert simply breached

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that wall with his at a forty-five-degree angle and on up the hill he went, working at a steady, deliberate pace, undeterred—unaware, it seemed. The good honest labor now looked like a passion. All that focused him was the wall, as if the blunt straining and building was a consumption, sort of demonlike. Nothing mattered, just the bending and hefting, the sweat and the groans, and that damn wall.

Wesley, of course, was watching, too, and when Albert crossed into his property he waited a day to see what would happen. Then two more days. Finally, on the fourth morning he saw Albert continue where he had left off, straight up the hill, slicing the field in two like a slow, gouging wedge.

It was time to talk with Albert. A man's grief had to stop sometime. Enough was enough.

Wesley stood to one side of the wall and said, "Albert, you're making this wall on my land. You know that, don't you?"

Albert said nothing. He worked as if Wesley were not there.

"I can't let this go on, Albert. You're going to have to stop."

Still the burly man lifted the stones and angled them in place, edging the wall up the hill piece by piece.

"Now I know you're upset about Debra. We all are. But, Albert, I can't let this go on."

Nothing.

"You hear me, Albert? You're on my property. I want you to stop. Now!"

Albert never faltered, never once acknowledged Wesley's presence. The wall inched forward almost inevitably, as if Albert were merely its instrument, as if the wall were building itself.

Wesley grew so humiliated at being ignored that a rage flamed in him. He was a man who could not be ignored like this, a man of means and position. He hired people like this obsessed neighbor of his, and fired them, too. The rage simmered and boiled until Wesley swiveled around and stomped away, back to the house.

That night he pushed and shoved the end of the wall where Albert left off, heaving the stones to the ground, demolishing the work Albert had done that day. He couldn't destroy all of it, because for him this was as strenuous as building it, and he was no match for Albert.

The next day Albert set to work as if nothing had happened. He stooped to pick up the stones that Wesley had shoved aside and rebuilt that section steadily, inevitably. By afternoon, he reached

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the point of making progress again and added another two yards up the hill.

Wesley watched enraged from his second-story window. And that night he again shoved and pushed the stones asunder, destroying what the madman had built, had rebuilt. This time he used a long prying pipe to help him.

Again, the next day, Albert walked to the end of the wall and without the slightest hint of acknowledgment of the scattered stones set about to rebuild it. This time it took the full day to recast all that Wesley had ruined.

Wesley was not one to forfeit advantage. After all, he had the night and his land, his position and means, a network of influential people and lawyers, and he would not be trespassed. He would not let this field man challenge him with such peasant superiority. So again that night he pushed and shoved the stones to the ground, slipping and cursing away the thought that Albert never slipped, never cursed dead stones. This was his land. Albert had no right, and stubbornness was not his exclusion. Wesley would never quit, never.

Albert rebuilt the wall the next day, and the next and the next. Soon people got wind of this incredible battle and they gave wide berth to both Albert and Wesley. They shook their heads and told each other, "Somebody has to give way. Something has to give."

For ten days and ten nights, the battle waged between the two men. It was as if Albert had turned into a living Sisyphus who struggled a monstrous round stone up a hill only to grow exhausted inches before reaching the crest and have it roll back, the corrosive frustration and suffering plunging him into eternal repetition. The difference was that Albert didn't recognize the frustration and suffering, nor even the exhaustion. And Wesley's anger had rooted too deep to consider any metaphor for his actions—he simply would not lose this ridiculous conflict to someone like Albert Koski. His stride through the village would not allow it.

As these forces of strength and pride continued day and night, the people in town grew increasingly apprehensive. Yet none dared approach either man for fear of accidentally releasing the trip-wire to some danger upon their own future. So they waited and watched.

In the end, they could only surmise. When they found Albert's body folded over the wall, his head smashed and bloodied by a stone,

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they knew that the sin had won. The stone lay beside Albert's head, splotched with blood. It was big enough to require two deliberate hands to lift above the head and to crash it in frenzy upon Albert's skull. His body draped over the wall in a startling scene of affection, almost an embrace, curved like love.

Wesley was found hard-eyed and sullen in his house. His hands were dirtied with grass and soil, his shirt and pants blood-streaked. At the trial his lawyer tried valiantly to paint an apocalypse of madmen locked in unforgiving, hateful insanity, but the verdict was inevitable. When Wesley was pronounced guilty of cold-blooded murder over a thoroughly minor and negotiable problem, the people in town said, "He should have known better."

Only a few in town really understood, and they remained silent. These were the ones who knew the unknowable Albert Koski. Never mind about Wesley—he was a child, Albert was a man. Albert was a builder, a protector, and he saw that those roan horses of Wesley's had eroded the house of his Debra and him. Who knows how much Wesley touched Debra in the private white house with the black shutters, except Albert. When Debra died, so then must Albert. And he did. And he punished Wesley. These people who knew Albert saw that within this meat of a man was more than a stone-wall builder. They knew, too, that they would never speak of how they thought Debra died.

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a *NEW* Ganelon story by

JAMES POWELL

"I imagine there is a procedure you follow to warn London of a compromised cypher," said Ganelon.

Horner nodded, avoiding the detective's eyes.

Ganelon II this time, sorting out a sticky problem at the British Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria . . .

THE VERBATIM REPLY

by JAMES POWELL

On a June afternoon in 1894, a tall unshaven man in dusty boots and a ragged grey-green jacket with dark-green facings in the German style appeared at the porter's lodge of the British Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria. "Hello, Iosep," he smiled in answer to the porter's disapproving gaze.

The porter's simple brow unfurled. "Mr. Ganelon, sir! Welcome, sir!" he cried eagerly. Carrying his prosperous stomach out of the lodge, Iosep the porter took up the new arrival's threadbare carpet-bag. Ambrose Ganelon, the second to bear that name, refused to surrender the flat wooden case with brass corners which he carried under his arm.

With his free hand outstretched, Iosep showed the way across the modern courtyard. "His Excellency is in London, sir. He will be distressed he missed your visit." Ganelon, son of the founder of San Sebastiano's famous detective agency, was an old friend of Ambassador Millington and, as Iosep knew to his profit, a generous guest during his previous stays at the Embassy.

"Then I'm in the hands of Mr. Brownlow?" asked the detective.

"Ah, sir," replied the porter sadly, "last night our poor chargé

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d'affaires was struck down by a carriage in the street. He is in the hospital. Mr. Horner is taking his place."

Horner? Ah, yes, Ganelon had a favorable memory of Gervaise Horner, the young Embassy clerk he'd met on his last visit. "A young man of bottom" were the words Millington had used to describe him, meaning he possessed character, solidity, and staying power. The Ambassador also predicted a fine future for Horner in the Foreign Service, high praise from a man who judged his subordinates severely.

The chattering Iosep ushered Ganelon into the Embassy. Recently Sofia had swept away much of the trappings of the Turk and replaced them with buildings such as the British Embassy, more in the current European style. As they started up the black-marble and steel-filigree staircase to the second floor, Horner emerged from the anteroom to the Ambassador's office carrying an envelope. He was a fair-haired, athletic-looking young man whose cheeks had not quite lost their down. In a diplomat's dark cutaway and striped trousers, he appeared a bit like a child caught playing grown-up.

"Has the carriage arrived, Iosep?" he asked. Then he saw the porter's shabby companion and he smiled. "Mr. Ganelon, what a pleasure to have you back with us again."

"Am I intruding?" asked the detective.

"Of course not," insisted Horner. "The more witnesses the better. A callow twenty-three-year-old is about to deliver an ultimatum to the Bulgarian Foreign Minister. I'd give my right arm for poor Brownlow's beard."

"And how is he, your chargé d'affaires?"

"He was delirious when I stopped by the hospital last night to collect his valuables," said Horner gravely. "This morning the hospital sent round to say he had fallen into a deep coma." Then he said, "Will you excuse me from making you welcome until I've returned from my visit to Foreign Minister Krumm?"

Ganelon bowed and continued up the stairs. While speaking to Horner, he had noticed through the anteroom doorway a very world-weary-looking gentleman lounging in a chair with his legs outstretched, his ankles and arms crossed, and his eyelids teetering on the edge of sleep. Or so they seemed. The English are admonished not to eat as if they are hungry. It seemed to Ganelon that some of them approached life the same way. He asked Iosep who the gentleman was.

"Viscount Vyvyan, sir. He came to us recently from the Paris

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Embassy." The porter's voice grew confidential. "A question of gambling debts and scandals of the heart, sir."

Yes, Ganelon thought he detected something of the diplomatic languor about the man. The British still operated their Foreign Service in tandem, the Diplomatic and the Foreign Office. The primary prerequisite of the former was an income of 400 pounds a year. Though the Foreign Office examinations were more competitive, at least its clerkships were salaried. Ganelon understood that young Horner had given up Sandhurst to enter the Foreign Office when the death of his father made him the sole support of a mother and three sisters.

Iosep left Ganelon alone in the small suite of rooms on the second floor where he was accustomed to stay. As he prepared to shave and take his first real bath in several weeks, he heard a carriage enter the courtyard and stop below his window. After a minute or two, it clattered off again. Ganelon smiled. The beardless lad was off to beard the formidable Dr. Krumm in his lair at the Foreign Ministry.

Ganelon allowed himself a long soak in the tub. It seemed to him he had been going full speed for the past two months. And part of it was his own fault. Yes, a small alarm bell should have gone off in his head two years ago when his archenemy, that manifold villain Duhamel Fong, was elected to the French Academy.

Europe had not found it strange that Fong should be among the Immortals, as the Academicians were called, for it only knew the man as the West's greatest authority on hypnotism. At the time, Ganelon had simply chalked it up to another example of Fong's incredible ego. But Ganelon had been mistaken. With the Immortals under his hypnotic spell, Fong accelerated their revision of the great French Dictionary, which for years had been bogged down in the mid-Cs. By the time the ancient frenzied scholars reached the Ms, people were remembering the legend that the end of the world would occur on the day the French Academy finished its Dictionary.

Fear gripped the Continent. And everywhere Europeans spoke out loud in their sleep in fear of the approaching Zs. Stock markets tumbled, property values plummeted, and whatever was tangible went for a song. And Fong was the buyer. Then, when he'd bought his fill, it amused him to stop work on the Dictionary and dispatch his immortal colleagues against Ganelon. Being attacked by a gang of assassins was one thing. But having one's life threatened by a military genius one day and the world's foremost toxicologist or a

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master of the psychological novel the next was quite something else again. For days the shadows across from 18 bis rue Blondin were crammed with the lurk of Academicians in their green-brocaded uniforms and rang with the clink of their ceremonial swords.

Ganelon dealt with each Immortal in turn as gently as the situation would allow. But the cumulative effect was draining. One day after a ninety-five-year-old theologian, an authority on the medieval mystics, tried to garotte him on a public street Ganelon decided to drop out of sight for a bit until the learned onslaught had abated.

That same afternoon, he kissed his beautiful wife, patted his son, heir, and namesake on the head, and vanished in disguise through a hidden passage in the basement, carrying a large camera and tripod over his shoulder. Whenever he felt the world was too much with him, Ganelon would take a roam through Europe disguised as an itinerant photographer, snapping pictures of the Continent's major criminals. It was healthy outdoor work and not that difficult. The streak of vanity runs deep in criminals and their sense of security when on home ground is almost endearing. Sometime during the photo session, Ganelon would bring out a mirror which he described as a light reflector and set it at an angle close to the subject's head. These shots showing full face and profile simultaneously were much prized by the police forces of Europe.

But on this particular trip, Ganelon began hearing things—a whispered word here, a word not spoken there, a careless boast. And when he added these scraps together, he decided a quick trip to Constantinople might frustrate one of Duhamel Fong's darker designs and pay him back in part for the plague of murderous Immortals. So Ganelon had shipped his photographic gear home by train and come to the British Embassy in Sofia for a brief rest-stop before finding a new disguise and slipping over the border into Turkey.

Ganelon emerged from the tub to discover the housekeeper had laid out one of the Ambassador's tweed suits and provided a pot of coffee and a box of Millington's excellent Russian cigarettes. Ganelon drank a coffee and smoked a cigarette while he dressed. Then he heard a carriage in the courtyard again.

He went to the window and watched as Horner descended from the vehicle, looking not unpleased with himself. Apparently the young man had delivered his government's message without any breach of protocol, like getting his foot caught in the Foreign Minister's wastepaper basket. Ganelon smiled down on the budding dip-

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lomat, for he had once been young himself. Then he lit another cigarette and stood at the window, thinking of the task that lay ahead in Constantinople.

After a while, he roused himself. He'd had another reason for stopping at the Embassy. He was anxious to have the fruits of his photographic labors sent back to San Sebastiano in the safety of a diplomatic pouch. Picking up the flat box with the brass corners, he went downstairs to find Horner.

The young Englishman's desk in the anteroom was empty. Through an open inner door, Ganelon saw Horner sitting in the Ambassador's chair. The safe in the wall behind him stood open. Ganelon sensed the young man had been sitting there motionless for a long time, staring with unseeing eyes at the papers all spread out on the desk. His face was white, his hair unkempt. Rarely had Ganelon seen anyone so cast down in so short a period of time.

"Anything wrong, Horner?" he asked from the doorway.

The clerk jumped and stared. "No, no," he insisted and hurriedly began gathering up the papers. "How can I help you, Mr. Ganelon?" asked Horner, failing in his attempt to muster a laugh. When Ganelon had explained about the diplomatic pouch, Horner said he would be happy to oblige. He accepted Ganelon's box and added it to the wall safe along with the papers, taking his time, with his back turned, as though trying to compose himself.

"You're sure nothing's wrong?" asked Ganelon again. "You looked a rather tragic figure a moment ago."

Horner shut the wall safe hard to lock it and turned around. "I was thinking of my family," he said. "A touch of homesickness, I suspect."

Ganelon judged the first remark to be true and the second false. "Of course," he said. "Well, thank you about the box." He was halfway across the anteroom before Horner caught up with him.

"Mr. Ganelon," he said, "I know from the Ambassador that on more than one occasion you have been of great service to our government. The recovery of the plans for the Prentice-Jenkins land torpedo, for example."

Ganelon bowed and waited for the young man to decide if he was going to speak his mind. The detective suspected he was going to be called on to recover something. Otherwise Horner wouldn't have specified that highly impractical Prentice-Jenkins battlefield device

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which was essentially a naval torpedo slung between two motorized bicycles.

After a moment's agonizing, the young man looked Ganelon straight in the face and blurted out, "An hour ago a private train left Sofia traveling at full speed on a non-stop trip to the Black Sea coast. Is there any way you could get on board and replace a letter in a dispatch case with another that I would give you?" He gave the detective a woeful look. "You see, if you cannot, then I am a ruined man." Horner fell into his seat, put his elbow on his desk, shielded his eyes with his hand, and shook his head hopelessly.

Ganelon dragged over a chair and sat down nearby. "Tell me," he said.

After a moment, Horner rallied himself and sat up straight. "Perhaps you know that several weeks ago the Bulgarians requested a clarification of my government's position on the question of warships in the Black Sea," he said. "Ambassador Millington was recalled to London to assist in drawing up our reply. Yesterday afternoon London cabled us in cypher to expect an answer today. That very evening Mr. Brownlow had his accident.

"Today my government's reply arrived by cable and in cypher. Thus the responsibility of decyphering and delivering the reply fell to me. I don't have to tell you how nervous I was. Dr. Krumm is quite a fire-eater and I knew he wouldn't care for my government's position on this question—all the more so when it was delivered to him by a young cub. Nevertheless, I unlocked the Ambassador's wall safe, took out the cypher, and set to work. When I was done, I returned the cypher to the wall safe. My next task was to recast my verbatim version of London's reply, rearranging the sentences and changing the phrasing. Need I say why?"

Ganelon shook his head. Of course the British would assume the Bulgarians had intercepted the encyphered cable. If the reply was decyphered and delivered verbatim, the Bulgarians would only have to compare the cable and the reply to break the British diplomatic cypher.

"I have been well schooled in the redrafting procedure by Mr. Brownlow," said Horner. "It isn't that difficult. However, in so sensitive a matter I worked with care and, I think, a good measure of success. Mr. Millington requires us to make fair copies of both the verbatim reply and its rephrased version so he can judge our handiwork.

"I had just finished this when Viscount Vyvyan arrived. You might

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say that Vyvyan's on the entertaining side of our business and he keeps entertainer's hours. I'm on the working side and schedule myself accordingly. I don't mind. Vyvyan isn't a bad chap, really. But he came to us under something of a cloud and the Ambassador still isn't quite sure what to do with him. He hasn't even given him a key to the wall safe yet. In any event, Brownlow thought highly enough of Vyvyan's penmanship that he set him the job of transcribing the final drafts of any messages going beyond the Embassy walls. Vyvyan has been very obliging in this regard. So when he arrived, I sat him right down with pen and paper and dictated my recast version of London's reply.

"Just as the ink dried, I heard Iosep's voice and thought the carriage had come to take me to the Foreign Ministry. I jumped up and in a bit of a rush I put the verbatim reply and my copy of the redraft in the wall safe and Vyvyan's copy of the redraft into its envelope and came out into the hall. But it was only Mr. Ambrose Ganelon. After I left you, I came back in here and chatted with Vyvyan until the carriage finally arrived.

"At the Foreign Ministry, I was shown into Dr. Krumm's office at once, where I found him in hat and coat, putting documents into a dispatch case. The Foreign Minister apologized for receiving me in that manner but said he had been summoned to Odessa to meet with his Russian counterpart on the warship question. Adding my government's reply to his dispatch case, he assured me he would read it before he reached the coast. With further apologies, he escorted me to where our carriages waited, his to take him to the railway station, mine to bring me back to my Embassy.

"I returned here intending to draw up a cable informing London of the Russo-Bulgarian meeting, but when I unlocked the wall safe to get the cypher I discovered Vyvyan's copy of the recast message staring up at me from a shelf. And the verbatim reply was missing. That could mean only one thing: like a blundering fool I'd put the verbatim reply in Dr. Krumm's envelope by mistake. In effect, I had hand-delivered the British diplomatic cypher to the Bulgarians."

"I imagine there is a procedure you follow to warn London of a compromised cypher," said Ganelon.

Horner nodded, avoiding the detective's eyes. "A code word. I haven't sent it yet."

"Ah," said Ganelon.

"I had to be sure, you see. I went through the wall safe with a fine-tooth comb."

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"And now?"

"Mr. Ganelon," said the young man in earnest dismay, "when London learns of my blunder I'll be dismissed from the Foreign Service." When the detective said nothing, he continued: "Think about it. We've been rephrasing our messages for years. What do you really think the chances are the Bulgarians are still checking them against the encyphered cable?"

The desperate young man waited for an answer and then said, "Damn it, Mr. Ganelon, in ten days London will be issuing the new six-month cypher. In ten days this whole blasted question will be moot!"

"You propose to do nothing to rectify the situation, then?" asked the detective.

"I'm just trying to explain why I haven't rushed to cable London," insisted Horner. Then he said, "Please, is there any way you can help me?"

Ganelon checked his pocket watch. "You know," he said, "my father kept up-to-date schedules of the entire railway system of Europe in his head. He could travel from Edinburgh to San Sebastiano without leaving his armchair, naming every station he passed through and calling out the time all along the way. He even turned queasy on the Channel steamer. But my mind's made of lesser stuff. Do you have a timetable?"

"I believe Iosep does," said Horner.

The detective nodded. "All right, I'll do my best to help you, Horner. Don't get your hopes up. But hold off sending your cable until I get back. Now where's Vyvyan's copy of the reply?"

Night was falling on Sofia by the time Ganelon returned to the Embassy carrying several mysterious parcels tied up with string. The sound of the detective's step on the staircase brought a grave-faced Gervaise Horner to the anteroom doorway. "Mr. Brownlow died half an hour ago," he said.

"He was an honorable man," said Ganelon.

"I've been thinking about just that," said Horner. "I'm glad you're back. I asked you to do the impossible. Now it's time for me to cable London about the cypher. I've already been a fool. If I delay any longer I'll be a scoundrel, too."

"Bravo," said Ganelon. As he rearranged his parcels to free one arm, he added, "There are times that try men's souls and incidents

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that test an individual's character." He drew an envelope from his inside coat pocket and handed it to Horner.

Inside the envelope Horner found the verbatim reply. He uttered a bewildered, "But how—?"

"If anyone asks," said Ganelon, "please tell them I boarded a high-speed, non-stop train that had left the station an hour before me, entered the compartment of a wide-awake Bulgarian Foreign Minister, and switched diplomatic messages right under his nose. That should add considerably to my legend. Unfortunately, the truth is more banal. Come along. I'll tell you what really happened while I change. There's a Bulgarian police inspector coming at any moment to drive me on the next leg of my journey to the Turkish border."

As Horner followed after him up the staircase, Ganelon began his story.

When he'd left the young Englishman, the detective had paused to consult Iosep's railway timetable in the porter's lodge. Then he hailed an up-to-date cab and drove away on India rubber tires to police headquarters. When he gave his name, he was promptly ushered into the office of an inspector on the happy list of regular recipients of the fruits of Ganelon's photographic wanderings. This grateful police official listened to Ganelon's needs and quickly supplied the names of two of Sofia's underworld specialists along with a blunt note to each advising full cooperation with the visitor from San Sebastiano.

An hour and a half later, Ganelon and a man with a splendid blue-black mustache and a leather suitcase were standing in a doorway across the street from the apartment building where Vyvyan lived. The detective consulted his pocket watch and a moment later the Englishman emerged and set off on foot down the boulevard. Ganelon and the man with the suitcase followed at a prudent distance.

Any doubt Ganelon had that Vyvyan was his man vanished as the imposing walls of the new railway station loomed ahead of them. They entered the building just in time to see the Englishman buy a platform ticket and pass through the turnstile. Ganelon and his companion did likewise, parting company on the platform amid the bustle of passengers and the steamy racket of modern transportation. As Ganelon crossed to the railway buffet, he noted the sleek and luxurious lines of the Green Train standing in the station.

The gloom of the café restaurant allowed the detective to slip into

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a corner table unobserved. Vyvyan had taken a seat in a window booth already occupied by Wolff Tuchmann. Ostensibly a wagon-lits porter on the Green Train, this man was actually one of Duhamel Fong's couriers, making regular pick-ups and deliveries between Berlin and Bagdad and back again. This bit of knowledge had served Ganelon so well in the past that he hadn't bothered to move against Tuchmann.

As the detective watched, Vyvyan passed an envelope across the table and then rose quickly and hurried out of the buffet. Tuchmann put the envelope in his inside breast pocket. Then he sat in the booth for a few minutes, his hand on a concealed revolver, his eyes darting about suspiciously as if he sensed he was observed. Finally he stood up and started to leave.

But as he passed through the doorway, the man suddenly looked back over his shoulder with a hard stare as though trying to pierce the dark in the very corner where Ganelon sat. At that moment, Tuchmann collided with a hurrying passenger with a splendid blue-black mustache. He might have fallen if the traveler hadn't had the presence of mind to grab him. Ganelon's corner was forgotten as the red-faced Tuchmann shook the helping hand from his lapel indignantly and reached inside his jacket to reassure himself that the envelope was still there before hurrying away in the direction of the Green Train.

The story begun on the staircase came to an end in Ganelon's room. "So there you are," said the detective as he untied the last of his parcels. "Thanks to a master pickpocket, the verbatim reply is back where it belongs."

"But why did the Bulgarians give it to Vyvyan?" demanded Horner.

Ganelon paused in the act of holding up the last part of his new disguise to examine it in the light. "My dear fellow, you still don't understand. Well, in a way I'm pleased you don't. All right, quite simply stated, there never was any mixup on your part—none at all. You delivered the correct copy of the message to Dr. Krumm."

"But that can't be," insisted Horner. "I found Vyvyan's copy in the wall safe and the verbatim reply was missing. And I'm the only one with the key."

"What about Brownlow's key?" asked Ganelon, as he began changing into his disguise—the outfit of a master of the Dancing Dervish brotherhood.

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"I put all of Brownlow's valuables in the wall safe. I saw his key. It was on his watchchain."

"But did you examine it closely? Did you try it in the lock?" asked Ganelon.

"Of course not," said Horner. "What are you getting at?"

"There were two reasons to stage Brownlow's accident," said Ganelon. "It left you in charge and it gave them a chance to replace his key with another—a lookalike prepared from Vyvyan's direction. That's what you saw on the watchchain." Ganelon slipped the long, bell-skirted dervish robe over his head and continued. "This afternoon, when you'd left for your appointment with Dr. Krumm, Vyvyan opened the wall safe with Brownlow's real key. He pocketed the verbatim reply and, using your fair draft of the rephrased message, he wrote it out again in his elaborate hand. Then he put Brownlow's key back on the watchchain and closed the wall safe."

Horner shook his head. "If Vyvyan could open the wall safe, then why all the rigamarole? Why not just copy the whole cypher?"

"Such modesty in a young man is certainly refreshing," said the detective. "My dear fellow, they didn't go to all this trouble for a cypher with a mere ten days of life left on it. The prize they were after was Gervaise Horner."

While that was sinking in, Ganelon looked down at the embroidered dervish slippers and wiggled his toes. "A bit tight," he said. "I am cursed with big feet." Then he continued. "You see, I know how these people work. Brownlow's accident with the Ambassador away was a little too neat for my liking. They made you believe that you'd compromised the cypher, knowing there were two things you could do: cover up your blunder or cable London. If you chose the cover-up, I rather think you would have soon been approached by someone in possession of the verbatim reply. To explain how he came by it, he would probably hint he was with Bulgarian Intelligence. In return for some information of a trivial nature, he would agree not to expose what you had done. Since you were already a scoundrel, you would agree. Then there would be other modest demands, which you would also agree to."

Ganelon put on the high brown-felt flowerpot of a hat and went to stand in front of the mirror above the fireplace to judge the result.

"Oh, you can be sure for the first few years you would not groan under the small favors he would demand of you. As a young man destined to rise high in the Foreign Service, you would be too valuable to squander. But each of these small services would bind you

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closer to this man and to his master, Duhamel Fong. Fong is a patient man. But one day he would reap a bountiful harvest for having you in his power.

"But either way, Fong would win," continued Ganelon. "If you'd cabled London and owned up to your blunder, you would have been dismissed from the Foreign Service. In that case, Vyvyan would probably have inherited your key. So at the very least Fong would end up with the new cypher when it came out and perhaps a few other choice items before Vyvyan ruined himself or was unmasked."

"The Ambassador will have my full report on Vyvyan when he returns at the end of the week," said Horner.

"Oh, I wouldn't give the Viscount more than forty-eight hours," said Ganelon. "You see, using that example of his handwriting you gave me, a very skilled forger composed an insulting and high-handed letter at my dictation in which Vyvyan appears to announce his resignation from Fong's despicable service. I must say that letter allowed me to get a few things off my chest. I hope I didn't overdo it. This communication was in the envelope my pickpocket substituted for the one he took from Tuchmann. Since Fong reads his mail promptly, I'd say Vyvyan can count his life in hours."

Carriage wheels ground across the courtyard cobbles. The Bulgarian police inspector had arrived.

"On the other hand, you could tell Vyvyan what I've done," said Ganelon. "With a bit of a head start, he might find someplace on the far rim of civilization to crawl into for the rest of his life. The decision is yours."

Ganelon was ready to go. To see if he had left anything behind him, he spun around like the dervish he was, with his arms outstretched, the right hand with upturned palm as if to claim the blessing of the Almighty, the left palm inverted to show that what he received would be handed on to others. Then he gathered up his carpet bag and he and Horner left the room.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA McGERR

The all-expenses-paid cruise through Alaska's Inside Passage included round-trip fare to Vancouver, where the ship sailed, and a thousand dollars in pocket money.

"Maybe we can cash in the tickets or sell them," Shirley suggested when the first excitement of winning had passed. "That would keep us in business a while longer."

"But it won't bring back our customers," Jack told her. "The shop is finished, darling. We might as well close up now and find another way to make a living."

And thus a young couple in a financial bind embark on a daring act of desperation . . .

DOUBLE IDENTITY

by PATRICIA McGERR

I never meant to kill anyone. All I wanted was the money and it seemed so easy. A half million dollars there for the taking. The plan was good. It should have worked. There was no way to foresee that before it ended somebody would die.

A year ago, our life, Shirley's and mine, was ideal. In one week we celebrated the fifth anniversary of our marriage and the first year of our business. Both were thriving. We had opened a combination book-and-gift shop in a suburban shopping mall and trade was brisk. We put in long hours and weren't getting rich, but we were able to meet expenses and pay ourselves enough to live on. We were even thinking, at that celebration, that we might soon be able to hire a part-time assistant. Then, only a few months later, the company that was the area's main employer went bankrupt. Un-

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employment soared and people who still had jobs worried about losing them. Books, even paperbacks, became a luxury item that most of our customers could do without. Suddenly the only line that showed a profit was greeting cards. Our bank account was dwindling and the stack of unpaid bills was growing.

One Saturday evening after the shop closed, we went back to the office to assess our position. Shirley, who kept the books, began to divide the bills into those that required immediate payment and those that could be deferred.

"Here's one we can forget."

She handed me the premium notice for our insurance policies. The agent had convinced us that, as business partners, we should insure each other's lives. Since we were both under thirty, the premiums were reasonable and we had settled on $250,000 each. Both policies had a clause that doubled the amount in case of accidental death.

"Half a million!" I studied the notice. "That's what I'm worth dead. If I walk in front of a truck, that could solve all our problems."

"Don't talk like that." Shirley reached out to squeeze my hand. "This is just a temporary bad spell. Things are bound to get better."

"Unless they get worse," I returned. "Isn't it ironic that we're bogged down in debt while there's a big insurance company willing to write us each a check for five hundred thousand?"

"And all one of us has to do is get killed." She took the notice away from me. "As in the book by James M. Cain. If you start looking at me like Fred MacMurray, I'll get very nervous. Remember, he and Barbara Stanwyck came to a bad end."

"We're smarter than they were," I said. "The policy doesn't lapse for two weeks. So keep it in a safe place. There ought to be a way to tap into all that money."

It was idle talk, fantasy to keep us from facing the harsh reality. Shirley put the premium notice in a drawer and that would have been the end of it if she hadn't, two days later, won second prize in a frozen-food promotion. The award was an all-expenses-paid cruise for two through Alaska's Inside Passage. It included round-trip fare to Vancouver, where the ship sailed, and a thousand dollars in pocket money.

"Maybe we can cash in the tickets or sell them," she suggested when the first excitement of winning had passed. "That would keep us in business a while longer."

"But it won't bring back our customers. The shop is finished,

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darling. We might as well close up now and find another way to make a living."

"That won't be easy."

"Not in these times," I agreed. "But at least we can go out in style." I read from the contest brochure. " 'You and a companion of your choice will share a luxurious stateroom on the Verandah Deck, choose from a menu of gourmet foods, enjoy dazzling entertainment at sea and unusual sights on land.' That will provide something to remember while we're sending out résumés."

"You're right," she said. "We'll take the trip. And then, who knows? Maybe our luck has begun to change."

"If it has," I added, "we should do something to help it along."

I didn't at that moment have any idea what that something might be. But suddenly, in the middle of the night, it came to me. It seemed so brilliant, so right, that I turned to Shirley who was sleeping peacefully beside me and shook her awake.

"I've got it," I announced. "I know how we can collect from the insurance company."

"Huh?" She blinked, then shaded her eyes as I switched on the bedside lamp. "What's happened, Jack? What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. Everything's perfect. I've figured out a way to get the half million."

"You have? Which of us is going to die?"

"I think it had better be you."

"You're joking, I hope."

"About your dying, of course. But about collecting on the policy, I've never been more serious." I patted her cheek. "Go back to sleep, love. I'll explain in the morning."

We got up early and over our first cup of coffee I told her my plan. It was still only a rough outline and she pointed out some of the difficulties. "But it might work," she agreed. "It really might. And if it does—oh, Jack, we'll be on velvet!"

"A nice change from being on the rocks," I said. "Then it's settled. If we take the voyage in August, we'll have nearly a month to take care of all the details."

We began by paying the premium to keep the policy in effect for another half year. The other unpaid bills were put out of sight. We now had a more urgent need for our money.

The first step was to establish Shirley's new identity. Driving forty miles to the next city, she rented a post-office box in the name of a long ago playmate who had died at the age of three. Then she

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sent to her home state for the child's birth certificate and as the reborn Ruth Johnson obtained a social-security card. She shopped for a travel wardrobe, choosing styles and colors that were different from those she usually wore. One of her first purchases was a wig that matched as closely as possible her own lightly waved shoulder-length blonde hair. With the wig in its box in the trunk of the car, she went to an unfamiliar beauty shop in another suburb and had her hair cut short, darkened, and restyled in tight curls. Before returning home, she put on the wig and from then on wore it always except when she was alone with me or on errands as Ruth Johnson. On those occasions, she wore heavier makeup and added a pair of clear-lensed spectacles. I began to have an odd sense that I was living with two women. Her final wigless excursion was to pick up Miss Johnson's cruise ticket. Paid for by cashier's check, it left us very close to broke, even though she had chosen a minimum-priced single cabin on C Deck, a long way from the luxurious twin assigned to prize-winning Shirley Peterson and spouse.

The day before departure, we closed the shop and packed three suitcases. My clothes and Shirley's went into two of them. She had, in her own, only one new item—an all-weather coat with multi-colored stripes. We called it her Joseph's coat. The third suitcase belonged to Ruth, though its tag would carry the Peterson name until we reached Vancouver.

It was an early flight and we had time only for coffee before starting for the airport. "It seems strange—" Shirley rinsed the cups and took a last look around the kitchen "—to think that I'll never come back to this apartment."

"And I'll be here as a grieving widower. Don't worry." I patted her shoulder. "I'll give you a fine memorial service."

"Why not?" She grinned. "You'll be able to afford the best."

The flight to Vancouver was uneventful, but Shirley and I shared a sense of nervous anticipation that resembled stage fright. But the stage we were about to walk out on was more like a tightrope from which a single misstep might send us flying downward. Without a net.

As U.S. citizens, we passed swiftly through Canadian Immigration and Customs. Then Shirley, having claimed the suitcase containing her new wardrobe, followed the signs pointing to the ladies' room. I put the other two bags on a cart and rolled it toward the area where a bus waited to carry passengers to our ship. I watched the

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luggage being loaded until I saw Shirley come through the airport door and then I boarded the bus. She had removed the blonde wig, put on the glasses, and replaced the tailored jacket of her black pantsuit with a green sweater. She was now, as attested by the new tag on her suitcase, Ruth Johnson. Glancing at me with no sign of recognition as she got on the bus, she found a seat several rows ahead of mine.

The dock area to which the bus delivered us was a study in controlled chaos. Four booths were labeled with letters of the alphabet. I went to the one marked M–R to check in Mr. and Mrs. Peterson while Shirley joined the G–L line. Beyond the booths were two tables for dining-room assignments and again we were divided. Shirley put Ruth Johnson on the early seating and I made late-sitting reservations for the Petersons. She finished ahead of me and was, when I walked up the gangway to the ship, already out of sight.

A staff member directed me to a cabin which proved to be as luxurious as the brochure had promised. Piped-in music was interspersed with announcements summoning people to the purser's office and warnings that visitors must go ashore. I didn't linger but went outside and up to the top deck where many of the other passengers were already clustered near the rail to watch the sailing. As the incongruously small tugboats guided the huge vessel out into the harbor, the loudspeaker announced that the restaurant was open for the early sitting dinner. To that call, Shirley, as Ruth, would respond.

I stayed on deck until we passed Vancouver's Lion Gate Bridge, then went back to the cabin. Both suitcases were there and I began at once to unpack, putting Shirley's clothes in one closet, mine in the other. While I was filling the dresser drawers, the cabin steward came by to introduce himself and list the ways he hoped to serve us during the voyage. I assured him that my wife—whose location I indicated with a glance at the closed bathroom door—and I wouldn't hesitate to call on him if we needed him and he went away. A short time later there was a light tap on the door. I opened it and "Ruth" slipped quickly inside.

"Whew!" She leaned against the door and let out her breath. "I'm glad we only have to keep this up for two days. It's not easy being two people."

"Did anyone see you come here?"

"No. There was no one in the hall except the steward and I stayed out of sight until he went into one of the other rooms." She removed

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the spectacles, dropped them into her large shoulder bag, and took out the blonde wig. "At least I can be myself until bedtime."

"How was dinner?"

"It was okay." She knew I wasn't asking about the food. "I'm at a table for six, but one seat was empty. The others are a couple with a two-year-old boy and a man traveling alone. The child was fussing, so there couldn't be much conversation and nobody noticed how little I ate. I'll be ready for a full meal at the main sitting."

As it was important to the plan to make friends quickly with some other passengers, I had asked the maitre d' to put us at a table for six. The others were a couple for whom the cruise was a silver-anniversary celebration and a woman traveling with her teenaged grandson. The other couple shared the champagne that had been a sailing present with us and by the time the meal ended we had all exchanged biographies and were on cordial terms. We went together to the lounge to share another table and watch the cabaret-style entertainment. When the show ended and our companions retired, we stayed to dance for an hour before returning to our cabin.

In our absence, the steward had turned down the beds, left a foil-covered chocolate on each pillow, and put fresh towels in the bathroom. I had a moment of panic, wondering if we had left behind any trace of Ruth Johnson. But that, I quickly realized, was foolish. Not having seen either woman, he couldn't distinguish one's possessions from those of the other. It was, however, a reminder not to be careless, to leave nothing in sight that might give us away.

The steward had also delivered the schedule of the next day's activities. Both breakfast and lunch, we were happy to note, were served on deck as well as in the dining room. So a vacant seat at those meals would cause no comment. Dinner was the only one Shirley would have to eat twice. The single item that caused us unease was the 9:30 A.M. fire and lifeboat drill, described as "a command performance for all passengers."

"There'll be different stations for the two cabins," Shirley pointed out. "What if they call the roll? I can't be two places at once."

"Then you'd better be Ruth until it's over," I decided. "Somehow I'll manage to cover for you at our station."

I opened the door and went out into the hall. There was no one in sight. I walked toward the lobby. No one there, either. Shirley waited for my all-clear signal, then hurried out of the room, into the lobby, and down the stairs. Ruth Johnson's cabin must be slept in, while I could, by dividing the night between the two beds, create

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the illusion of my wife's presence. Before leaving in the morning I dampened and rumpled both sets of towels and hung her nightgown beside my pajamas on the bathroom door.

I had coffee and a roll from the deck buffet and then, following the loudspeaker's instructions, went back to the cabin for my life jacket. As a precaution, in case anyone checked, I locked the second jacket in a suitcase before going to our station.

I needn't have worried about Shirley's absence. There was no roll call and, with dozens of passengers crowded into the small game-room looking like aliens in the padded orange jackets, no individual would be missed. The drill over, I went back to the cabin and found Shirley already there. The wig on and the glasses off, she was prepared to resume her own identity until dinnertime.

Next on the schedule was an illustrated lecture on the shore excursions available at each of the three ports of call. We listened with close attention to the description of Ketchikan, where we would dock at 8:00 A.M. the next day. Between that time and the 4:00 P.M. sailing, our plan must be put in full operation. The right sequence of shore excursions was crucial to its success. When the agent finished his talk and the lights went on again, the room became a cacophony of voices as couples and groups debated the choices offered. For Shirley and me, the vital element was not the sights to be seen but timing, the hours at which each tour began and ended. On that basis, we determined that we would go together on the bus tour of the town and surrounding territory which left right after we docked, while I would go alone by seaplane to the Misty Fjords Monument. The latter was expensive but seemed, since it would get me back to the ship just before sailing, a very good investment. We stopped at the tour office to buy our tickets, then relieved our tension by playing shuffleboard until it was time for the main sitting lunch.

Mrs. Miller and her grandson were already at the table and in the middle of a heated argument.

"I know, dear," she was saying, "I'm sure it would be an educational experience, but I can't let you go off alone."

"It's not fair," he muttered. "Just because you're scared of flying, I have to miss the best thing on this whole dumb cruise."

"Now, Eric, you don't mean that." She smiled at us apologetically. "He has his heart set on that flightseeing trip tomorrow. I'd like to take him, but—well, the truth is I'm nervous enough on a commer-

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cial airline and the thought of riding in one of those little planes—" A shudder completed the thought.

"I know just how you feel." Shirley seized the opening. "Jack's been trying to talk me into going with him, but I said no way! I'm sure it's perfectly safe, but I wouldn't enjoy one minute of it."

"You'll be sorry," I teased, "when I come back and tell you what you missed."

"You're taking the flight?" Eric looked at me with envy. "Gosh, Gran, I've never been on a seaplane. Why can't I go by myself? I'm no baby."

"I know that and I'd like to let you." She hesitated, unhappy with her decision. "But to send you off alone, so far from home—I can't, Eric, I'd be too worried."

"I don't want to interfere," I said quickly, "but if it would help, I'd be glad to have Eric come with me. I promise to take good care of him."

"You will?" The boy's eyes brightened. "Say yes, Gran. You've got to say yes."

She hesitated. "I don't want to put you to any trouble."

"No trouble," I assured her. "I'll be glad to have the company."

"Then it's settled, Gran." Eric didn't give her a chance to say no. "We'll get my ticket right after lunch."

The other couple had come in during the exchange and they, too, were divided on the question of flightseeing. Mrs. Bartlett was eager to go, her husband reluctant. She was delighted and he was relieved by my offer to act as escort. Shirley and I exchanged a quick glance of satisfaction. The woman and boy were perfect as my protective cover.

For the rest of the day we were free to act like any other carefree couple on a pleasure trip. We played quoits and Scrabble, joined the complimentary dance class, and drank tea with little cakes. After tea, Shirley slipped away to dine as Ruth Johnson at the early sitting. Less than an hour later, as I was dressing for the Captain's welcome-aboard party, she tapped at the door.

"I didn't expect you so soon," I said. "You must have eaten fast."

"I didn't get past the salad," she said. "The man at my table—his name is George Denton—was coming on really strong. He thinks he's God's gift to women and I drew the lucky number."

I felt stirrings of jealousy. "What did he try?"

"Nothing to get excited about," she soothed. "After all, he thinks

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I'm single and I probably took the cruise to find a man. Since unattached males are a minority, I should be flattered he picked me."

"So why did you skip dinner?"

"Because he said he'd been looking all over the ship for me today and was resolved that we'd spend the evening together. I couldn't risk his following me out of the dining room, so I said I was feeling the motion of the ship, pantomimed imminent seasickness, and got away in a hurry."

She was wearing a long black skirt and black sweater. Replacing the sweater with a silver-sequined tunic made it a totally different costume. With freshly applied makeup and the blonde wig, she was transformed in a few minutes from mousy Ruth to Shirley at her most glamorous. I put on my best blazer and we went arm in arm to the party. The ship's photographer was just inside the lounge and as we joined the line to shake the captain's hand his camera clicked.

"That's one picture I'm going to buy," I whispered to Shirley.

"To remember me by?" she returned. The words, barely audible, brought the sudden realization that, if all went according to plan, she would no longer be at my side by the time the pictures went on sale. I had, of course, known that from the beginning, but the full force of the knowledge hadn't until that moment hit me. It added significance to everything we did that evening. Drinking, dining, dancing—all for the last time. When we went back to our cabin, I was unwilling to let her go.

"If that television series is any guide," I argued, "cabin hopping is part of the cruise program. The steward won't raise an alarm if Ruth's bed isn't slept in."

"Probably not," she conceded. "But he might gossip about it. Ruth is supposed to be inconspicuous, remember? We have it planned, Jack, down to the last detail. We mustn't make changes now."

So I spent the night alone, again in both beds but not getting much sleep in either of them. Shirley, too, showed signs of strain when she joined me early the next morning. While we were making preparations for the day, the announcement came that the ship had docked at Ketchikan, the first port in Alaska. As soon as the Canadians and other non-U.S. citizens aboard were cleared by Immigration, all passengers would be able to go ashore. We hurried on deck for a quick breakfast, then left the ship.

Our tour bus waited at the end of the gangway, but before boarding we took a walk along the waterfront. The dock was on pilings out over the water and an array of smallcraft were in the harbor. Some

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distance from the ship, a parking area was filled with cars and trucks but we saw no people. Near one of the trucks was a large trashcan and Shirley, sighting it, nodded approval. It would fit well into our plan. We retraced our steps and got on the almost full bus.

The streets of Ketchikan were narrow and steeply sloped. Our first stop was beside the creek where salmon fought their way upstream to spawn and die. As cameras clicked, we watched the dark shapes struggle against the current in the shallow, rock-filled water. Shirley reached for my hand and clasped it tightly.

"Sad, isn't it?" She seemed near tears. "All that effort and only death at the end."

"I know." We moved away from the other tourists, still holding hands, sharing an emotion that had little to do with the salmon's fate. "Are you having second thoughts? We don't have to go through with it. We can go back to the ship and enjoy the cruise. If Miss Johnson misses the boat in Ketchikan, that's not our problem. There's nothing to connect her with us. But we have to decide now. In a few more hours we'll be irrevocably committed."

"We've already decided," she said firmly. "If we don't go through with it now, there'll never be another chance. And we'd always wonder."

"If you're sure—"

"I'm sure. Come on. The guide is calling everyone back to the bus."

The bus stopped again at a fish hatchery and a totem museum, then drove out of town to an old Indian campsite filled with tall totem poles and a tribal house. We tried to look at everything, to listen to the guide's words, to simulate interest in the history and myth with which we were surrounded, but all we could really think about was the passage of time, with each tick of the clock drawing us closer to the moment of truth. It was a relief when the tour ended and the bus returned to the ship.

There was just time for a quick lunch before the start of the flightseeing trip. Shirley came with me to the gangplank where Mrs. Bartlett and Eric were waiting, with her husband and his grandmother to see us off. We mocked the three others for their lack of courage and then, with a final chorus of goodbyes, were off.

The scenery, I'm sure, was spectacular, but I was only dimly aware of the changing colors as the small floatplane climbed the sides of a granite cliff and skimmed the tops of evergreen trees before land-

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ing on a deep-blue lake. I tried to hide my preoccupation, to match Eric's enthusiasm as he pointed out a soaring eagle, a playful seal, a group of otters, but my mind was back in Ketchikan and surreptitious glances at my watch linked me to the timetable Shirley and I had so carefully worked out.

She would stay on the ship for half an hour or so after our departure. Then she'd put on her Joseph's coat, stuff Ruth's brown coat and handbag into the red, white, and blue tote bag the ship had given every passenger as a souvenir. She'd tell Mrs. Miller she'd decided to go ashore to do some shopping and cash two $50 traveler's checks at the purser's office. The plan called for her to visit several stores and do whatever seemed appropriate to make herself remembered. That was the easy part. From then on it would be very tricky.

Thinking about the next step, I felt a rush of guilt. I should be doing it, I told myself, not up here enjoying—or pretending to enjoy—the scenery while she did all the work, took all the risks. But we had known from the beginning that she had to be the one. Cosmetics, hairstyle, clothes—they all made it easy to change a woman's appearance. For a man it was much more difficult, especially if, like me, he's six foot two and built like a fullback. I could never have passed as two different people on the same ship. So it had to be Shirley who would go into a ladies' room, put her Joseph's coat and wig into the tote bag, and come out as Ruth Johnson.

Was it working? I wondered. Had she been able to make the switch without attracting attention? Would she, when she got back to the docks, find the parking area as deserted as it had been that morning? Or had some unforeseen obstacle already made the plan unworkable? Would I return to the ship and find that Shirley was still Shirley and intending to remain so? As our plane eased down for a landing, I was half hoping that was how it would be.

Mrs. Miller, trying not to look anxious, was waiting near the top of the gangplank. We turned in our boarding passes and Eric, aglow with enthusiasm, rushed ahead while I followed Mrs. Bartlett.

"You should have come, Gran!" he exclaimed. "We were in this little plane and it landed right on the water."

"I want to hear all about it." She gave him a quick hug, celebrating his survival.

"We've a lot to tell," I assured her. "You stay-behinds are going to be very envious. Where's Shirley?"

"She went back to Ketchikan to shop," Mrs. Miller answered. "She

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promised to meet me in the lounge for tea and show me what she bought."

"There goes our credit limit." I looked at my watch. "It's almost teatime. Let's warm up with Irish coffee while Eric gives you a full report. Shirley can find us there."

I shepherded the two women and the boy to a corner table in the lounge, ordered three Irish coffees and hot chocolate for Eric, then sat back and let him take over with a hyperbolic account of the flightseeing tour. We sipped and he talked through the announcement that the ship was leaving Ketchikan and tea was being served. A few minutes later, Mr. Bartlett joined us.

"Not for me, thanks." I waved aside the waiter who was offering a tray of pastries. "I'd better see what's keeping my wife."

I excused myself and went down to the cabin. It was, as expected, empty. The Joseph's coat and tote bag were gone. Following the scenario, I made a quick tour of the public areas. I was scanning the people stretched out in deckchairs on the Promenade Deck when "Ruth" came out the door. She raised her left hand to show me the bandaged thumb from which she had drawn blood. I gave her a quick nod and continued on while she turned in the opposite direction. Just then a man followed her through the door. He was tall and thin with dark curly hair and the kind of features some women might call handsome.

"Hey, Ruthie, wait up!" he called, hurrying after her. "What's your hurry? If I didn't know better, I'd think you were avoiding me."

Her reply was too low for me to hear, but his voice carried down the deck. "Hey, we're all in the same boat." The way he said it made me sure it was a favorite joke. "Come on, we're here to have a good time. Loosen up—let me buy you a drink."

Looking over my shoulder, I saw him grasp her arm and felt a surge of anger. It took all my will power to turn away and keep on walking.

I finished my inspection and returned to the group in the lounge. "I can't find her anywhere," I told them with a frown.

"Did you try the casino?" Bartlett suggested. "She's probably hooked on one of the slot machines."

"I looked there. I looked in the bars. I looked all over. I'm worried that she may have missed the boat in Ketchikan."

"She's too bright for that," Bartlett said. "I'll go with you to the purser's office. We'll have him page her."

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The purser was reluctant to help. "It's a big ship," he pointed out. "If we make an announcement every time two passengers miss connections, the speaker will never be quiet."

"This is an emergency," I insisted. "She went ashore to shop and there are no packages in the room, no sign at all that she came back. I've got to know whether she's on board."

"Go on—" Bartlett backed me up "—set the man's mind at rest."

The purser hesitated, then gave in. "I suppose I can make an exception." He picked up the microphone. "Mrs. Peterson. Mrs. Shirley Peterson. Please come to the purser's office." He waited a few seconds, then repeated the message.

Bartlett sat down to wait. I paced. After ten minutes I went back to the counter.

"You see," I told him, "she's not here! She's still in Ketchikan. How can we get her back on the ship?"

"We can't," he answered blithely. "It will be up to her to come to Juneau and rejoin the cruise tomorrow."

"She's alone!" I pitched my voice high with anxiety. "In a strange town! She doesn't know anybody!"

"Take it easy, Jack." Bartlett came forward, put a hand on my arm. "Shirley's a competent young woman. She'll probably go to the tourist information office and they'll tell her what to do. There must be plane service between Ketchikan and Juneau."

"That's correct," the purser confirmed. "An air ferry. It has happened before that a passenger will lose track of time or drink too much and miss the sailing. They always turn up at the next port."

"You see," Bartlett soothed. "She'll be back on the ship tomorrow with some adventures of her own to tell us about."

"Why hasn't she called?" I demanded. "There's a ship-to-shore phone. She knows that. And she knows I'll be frantic when I find her gone. It's been more than an hour since we sailed. Why isn't there at least a message to tell me she's all right?"

"Maybe there is," Bartlett said. "Let's go to the radio room and inquire."

There was, of course, no message. I explained the situation to the radio operator and concluded, "I know my wife. She's very practical. It's unlikely that she'd miss the sailing. If she did, the first thing she'd do is call and tell me what happened. Ketchikan has those narrow streets and steep hills. She may have fallen or been hit by a car. There has to be some way I can find out."

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"It's possible," the operator said, "to put through a call to the police if you want to ask them to investigate."

"I do," I assured him and was soon connected with the Ketchikan station, where a female police officer listened sympathetically as I told my story. There was, she said, no report of an accident but she would check with the hospital, the tourist bureau, the airport, and anyplace else that might have knowledge of a stray American tourist. I gave her Shirley's description, with emphasis on the coat of many colors.

"If you call again in, let's say, two hours," she suggested, "I'll try to have more information for you."

I spent the next two hours alone in my cabin. It was easier than trying to sustain the role of worried husband when my real concern was whether the police would find the evidence that Shirley had planted.

When I called back, the news was, from my point of view, good. "The coat your wife was wearing, Mr. Peterson," the policewoman began. "You said it had different-colored stripes. Were they red and green and blue and purple?"

"That's right! You've found her!" I let my voice rise in excitement, then drop in dismay. "Is she hurt? What's happened? She's not—"

"No, sir, we've only found her coat. We checked the main shopping area and talked to a clerk who sold her a pound of fudge. She remembered her because she left the box on the counter and came back for it a few minutes later. She told the clerk she had finished her shopping and was about to return to the ship."

"But she never got here. And you have her coat. I don't understand."

"We searched the dock area." The woman was deliberately filling in details to delay and perhaps prepare me for the final shock. "We questioned the people on the boats there. No one had seen her. But one of our officers noticed some colored cloth sticking out from under the lid of a trashcan. He looked inside and found the coat. The seam is ripped and two of the buttons are missing."

"Somebody attacked her, tore off her coat, and threw it away—is that what you're trying to tell me? Then where is she? She may be badly hurt or in danger. Why haven't you found her?"

"We're doing our best, Mr. Peterson. All available personnel are on it. We'll be in touch again as soon as there's news."

"Find her," I begged. "Please find my wife before it's too late."

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The evening passed slowly. When ten o'clock came with no word from the police, I called the station again. A different officer answered and told me the trashcan had yielded additional evidence. A box of fudge and a handbag containing Shirley's credit cards and traveler's checks, but no cash. There was, he added reluctantly, blood on the collar of her coat.

"Oh, no," I said faintly.

"It looks bad," he admitted. "The state troopers have taken over the investigation. They'll contact you when your ship gets to Juneau."

There was nothing left to do but wait. I wanted to go down to C Deck, to Ruth Johnson's cabin, and congratulate Shirley on how well she had done her work. Everything was fitting into place and we were about to become very rich. That night I slept soundly, with no need to occupy both beds.

I woke early and went to the dining room. The others were already at the table. I repeated what the policeman had said and they all pretended to share my expressed belief that Shirley was only hurt, not dead, and would soon be found. While we ate, there was a series of announcements. The ship had docked. The Customs and Immigration people were on board. Passengers leaving the cruise at Juneau should report to the lounge for clearance. The buses for the Mendenhall Glacier tour were ready to load. At last came the one for which I was waiting.

"Mr. John Peterson, please come to the library."

"It's the state troopers." I dropped my napkin on the table and pushed back my chair. "Maybe they have news."

"I'll come with you," Mrs. Miller offered. "They may have questions for me, too, since I was the last one to see her—" she caught herself before uttering the fatal word "—before she left the ship."

"We'll all come," Mrs. Bartlett seconded.

The two troopers in the library didn't object to the presence of the others at the interview. They had little to add to what I'd learned the night before. No further trace of Shirley had been found. Divers were searching the waters near the spot where the coat and bag were left. With my account supplemented by the Bartletts and Mrs. Miller, they collected a detailed report of our previous day's activities up to the point where we became aware that the ship had sailed without my wife.

"Can you come to headquarters this afternoon, Mr. Peterson?" the

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older trooper asked when we finished. "Ketchikan is sending us the evidence from the docks and we'll need you to identify your wife's property."

Again my friends were determined to come with me. They could, they assured me, see all they wanted of Juneau and its environs before and after the headquarters visit. I wished I could go sightseeing, too, but realized it would be unsuitable, so I stayed on board and thought of what Shirley and I might do with a half million dollars.

The troopers were headquartered near the city limits. The younger of the two men we'd seen that morning was waiting with three transparent plastic bags. The largest contained the Joseph's coat, Shirley's handbag was in the second, and the smallest held a single black glove. I looked at the bags for a long time. It seemed fitting that I should find it difficult to speak and Mrs. Miller came to my rescue.

"That's Mrs. Peterson's coat. And the pocketbook looks like the one she was carrying. I don't remember her gloves."

"She has a pair like that," I told him. "But the police in Ketchikan didn't mention a glove. Where did it come from?"

"It turned up this morning when they started diving," the trooper explained. "It was caught on a board at the edge of the pier. I'm afraid it increases the probability that she was thrown in the water."

"But the divers—have they—" I left the question dangling.

"Not yet."

"That's good news, isn't it?" Mrs. Bartlett encouraged.

"Not necessarily," the trooper said. "Occasionally people fall off the docks, usually under the influence, and are caught in the current and swept out to sea. And the body is never found."

"You think my wife is dead, don't you?" I tried to sound numb with despair.

"All the evidence points that way," he answered. "The purser told us she had at least a hundred dollars in cash when she left the ship. There are some rough characters in Ketchikan. Sometimes they prey on lone tourists. One of them may have hit her on the head, taken the money, and thrown her in the water. We do our best to be on the lookout for them, but I'm sorry, Mr. Peterson, you'd better be prepared for the worst."

"No!" My protest was vehement. "I won't believe it! Shirley is

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alive—she has to be!" My eyes swept the room. The pitying expression on each face assured me that no one else held that belief.

Since the ship didn't sail until midnight, many of the passengers, including my tablemates, had made plans to have dinner ashore and sample Juneau's night life. Having with difficulty persuaded them not to change their plans, I spent the evening alone in my cabin with a book. At a little after ten, there was a knock on the door. I opened it and Shirley stepped inside.

"The suspense is destroying me," she said. "I've got to know what's happened. Have you talked to the police? Do they believe I'm dead?"

"Everything's great, darling—just as we planned." I gave her a tight hug, then drew her over to the bed and we sat down side by side. "You did *everything* right. Leaving your glove at the edge of the dock was a master stroke. The police are sure you were robbed and murdered. The insurance company will have to accept that verdict. And if the size of the policy gives me a motive for murder, I've an air-tight alibi. Eric, Mrs. Miller, and the Bartletts have accounted for every minute of my time. There's no way I can be accused of killing you."

"Then it's real." Her voice was soft, incredulous. "It always seemed like a game we were playing, a dream I'd wake up from. But it's not. We're really rich. Or at least, you are." She smiled up at me. "You're a wealthy widower and I'm Ruth Johnson. How long will it be before we can be together again?"

"That depends on the insurance company. They'll make a thorough investigation, but sooner or later they'll have to pay. You'll do as we planned—stay on the West Coast and get temporary jobs. There's always work for a good secretary. When I get the money, I'll come where you are. It won't surprise anybody that after such a tragic loss I want to move away, start a new life. We'll meet, begin dating, and, after a suitable time has passed, get married."

"Then I'll be your second wife. I promise not to be jealous if you still have feelings for the first one."

We kissed. "Speaking of jealousy," I said, "who was that fellow chasing you around the deck yesterday?"

"George Denton—the guy at my table. I told you about him."

"I remember. The one who's on the make. Have you been able to discourage him?"

"I stopped trying. I realized he was right. It doesn't make sense to come on a cruise alone and not want to make friends. So I let him

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take me to dinner tonight. We went to one of the hotels where there's music for dancing."

"And he was willing to say goodnight at your cabin door?"

"I gave him no choice. Don't make problems, Jack. I'm just trying to act like a normal cruise passenger and not attract attention."

It was nearly dawn when she went back to her own stateroom.

During the night the ship had sailed into Glacier Bay. When I went out on deck, a light rain was falling and we were surrounded on three sides by craggy ice peaks and icebergs floated in the water around us. From the way the other passengers looked at me, it was clear that word of Shirley's disappearance had spread through the ship. A few came over to express sympathy but most avoided me like a carrier of plague. Some eyed me darkly, no doubt recalling the statistics that most murders are family affairs. It made me doubly glad that my tablemates were ready to swear to my innocence. But I stayed away from them, not wanting to put a pall on what was for them a pleasure trip.

Finding a chair in an out-of-the-way corner, I listened to the park ranger's description of the spectacle and watched great chunks of ice break off from the peaks and rumble into the sea in what the ranger called "calving." My contemplation was interrupted by a light tap on my shoulder. A paper pellet dropped into my lap and I turned my head to see Shirley walking rapidly away. I unrolled the paper and read the brief message: *There's trouble. We have to talk. Meet me on the Sun Deck in ten minutes.*

The rain was coming down hard with a frigid wind and the uncovered top deck was deserted. I waited near the railing and a minute later Shirley was beside me.

"It's George Denton," she explained. "He's been spying on me. He can't believe any woman would turn him down without a reason, so last night he followed me and saw me go into your cabin. Today everybody on the ship is talking about the murder and making guesses about what happened. George thinks he has the answer."

"He knows who you are?"

"No. He thinks I killed myself—I mean Shirley."

"I don't understand."

"He believes that you and I—that is, you and Ruth—are lovers and that Ruth killed Shirley."

"Oh! How crazy!"

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"Remember the bandage I put on my thumb after I stuck it to draw blood for my coat? George thinks I cut myself when I stabbed her. And he was watching when I threw the bag with the wig overboard. He believes I was getting rid of the weapon."

"We were so careful," I said, "to make sure I had an unbreakable alibi, but you don't have any."

"Your alibi makes George even more sure he's right. His theory is that we planned it together and then—because the husband is always the chief suspect—you covered yourself while I did the deed."

"What did you tell him?"

"I denied everything, of course. But that won't stop him."

"What is he going to do?"

"Nothing, if we pay him enough. Otherwise he threatens to tell his story to the police."

" 'Woman accused of her own murder.' That would be an unusual headline."

"He has no real evidence," she said. "Surely they wouldn't arrest me just on his word that he saw me throw something overboard."

"That's not the problem," I told her. "You're in no danger of being arrested. If it came to that, you can prove you're not dead. But if Ruth Johnson's name gets on the record, the most cursory investigation will show that she's a woman with no past. Once she's linked with me, our whole scheme will unravel."

"We haven't murdered anyone," she pointed out. "Since you haven't filed an insurance claim yet, we're not even guilty of fraud."

"That's true. All we have to lose is half a million dollars. Damn this Denton! Did he tell you how much—"

"Ah, there you are, Ruthie!" The man himself reached the top of the stairs and came toward us. "I thought I'd find the two of you together. Have you told him my proposition?"

"Miss Johnson," I answered coldly, "says you have some cockeyed theory about my wife's disappearance and are trying to blackmail her."

"Come off it, chum," he jeered. "The three of us are alone here and we all know the truth, so why waste time pretending? As a good citizen, I should tell the police what I saw."

"You saw nothing," I retorted. "Miss Johnson can tell the police the real truth—that you made up a story to get even with her for giving you the brushoff."

"She can say that," he conceded. "But whichever of us the police believe, they'll have to check out my story. I bet any money that

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when they go into Ruthie's background, they'll find the two of you knew each other before you started this trip. Then who will be the liar?"

"Assuming, for the sake of argument," I said, "that we've something to hide, you're way off in thinking I can buy your silence. The fact is, I'm flat broke—up to my ears in debt."

"No kidding. You've got one of the highest-priced cabins on the ship. I suppose you paid for it with food stamps."

"No, my wife won it in a contest. I'm telling you the absolute truth. If I wrote you a check, it would bounce."

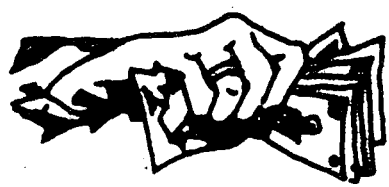
"In that case—" he turned away from me. "—it's up to you, babe. Since your boy friend's so poor, you can make the payoff. I'm not talking money. Show me a good time for the rest of the trip and I'll forget what I know. Maybe you'll forget this loser when you see what a real man can—"

"Why, you—!" Consumed with rage, I seized his shoulder and spun him around. "You filthy—"

"Jack! No!" Shirley tried to move between us as I drew back my arm. With my other arm, I pushed her aside. Her feet slipped on the wet deck and she fell backward.

I heard the crack of her head against the iron rail, saw blood seep down to her collar. I dropped to my knees beside her and looked into eyes that stared, unseeing, back. Above me, sounding as if it came from a great distance, I heard Denton's voice.

"She's dead, Peterson," he said. "You've killed both your women."



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EARN Royalties from your inventions or new product ideas. Nuprodux International, 1377 K St. NW, Suite 203, Washington, D.C. 20005.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW $25,000 "OVERNIGHT". Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SM, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

FAST-Action Loans by mail! Any Amount! Any Purpose! Fast-Easy-Confidential! Free Details! Creditmasters, Box 507-ELQ, Floral Park, New York 11002.

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MAILING LISTS. 39 categories. Free information, E. Lobeck, 251 Sunset Avenue, Englewood, N.J. 07631.

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Classified Continued

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ORIGINAL Marie Laveau VOODOO DOLL. The real thing, not for the foolish. Complete, with instructions. $10. Carol, P.O. Box 55-8628, Miami, Fla. 33255-8628.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

FREE dealership!! Receive $25.00 orders keep $15.00! Hottest pulling circular around! For complete FREE dealership send long stamped self-addressed envelope: Worldwide #18, Box 15940, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

CAN you stuff 1000 envelopes for $500.00 weekly? Send six 20¢ stamps. Blume, Post Office Box 460159, Garland, Texas 75046-0159.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

"HUNDRED$ WEEKLY!" GUARANTEED PROCESSING $TAMPED ENVELOPES! $TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.

$$$ LOOK AT THIS!! You can now get $100,000, YES, One hundred thousand to $500,000 "CASH" in as little as 50 to 60 days, with "E.I.E's" NEW multi-level Marketing program. We didn't believe it either, see for yourself!! RUSH $1 for details and application to: E. M. O'CONNOR, Box 26116, Washington, D.C. 20001.

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SINGLE? Meet that special person—anywhere! Very low fees. DATELINE, 316 Fifth Ave., New York 10001. (202) 328-1300 or (513) 821-4600 or (612) 888-1240.

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PERSONAL—Cont'd

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MEN WANTED! Earn $500 weekly providing special services for ladies! Your area! Free application. Box 574-I, Griffith, IN 46319.

BE A PAL!! A Pen Pal. Nation wide service. Send $5.00 for complete kit. Sierra Company, 6704 Sherman Way, Bell, CA 90201.

ORIENTAL Ladies. Faithful, traditional affectionate. Thousands seeking marriage, now! Cherry Blossoms, Box 1021DA, Honokaa, Hawaii 96727.

BEAUTIFUL, COLLEGE EDUCATED, ENGLISH SPEAKING, FILIPINO WOMEN SEEK MARRIAGE. We have doctors, nurses, teachers,...If you're looking for a good woman, we have hundreds on file. 1-701-873-4316 for introductory package.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

BEAUTIFUL, sincere and devoted Oriental ladies are seeking marriage. Free information. Filam, Box A3713-DF. Chicago, Il 60690.

RECORDS, TAPES & SOUND EQUIPMENT

FREE Promotional albums, concert tickets, stereos, etc. Information: Barry Publications, 477 82nd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11209.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

CBS MYSTERY THEATRES—Over 700 shows on reels or cassettes. Best quality, fastest service. Catalog $1.00: P.O. Box 3509, Lakeland, FL 33802.

TRAVEL

MYSTERY CRUISE—INTRIGUE and SUSPENSE April 28, 1985 on board luxurious TROPICALE. Eight days cruising Mexican Riviera from $945.00 including air. Crime Caper by John Ball (Author of In the Heat of the Night). Call for free brochure (800) 522-1500 Extn. 210, Mystery Cruises, 22030 Ventura Blvd., Suite A, Woodland Hills, Calif. 91364.

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR FICTION COMBINATIONS:
Mystery, Sci-Fi, or Special

OR TRY ONE OF OUR OTHER COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $59.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.95 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $2.95 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by ___x .85___

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example. One 20 word ad $59.00 x 3 months = $177.00 x .85 = $150.45)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$59.00**	(2) **$59.00**	(3) **$59.00**	(4) **$59.00**	(5) **$59.00**
(6) **$59.00**	(7) **$59.00**	(8) **$59.00**	(9) **$59.00**	(10) **$59.00**
(11) **$59.00**	(12) **$59.00**	(13) **$59.00**	(14) **$59.00**	(15) **$59.00**
(16) **$59.00**	(17) **$59.00**	(18) **$59.00**	(19) **$59.00**	(20) **$59.00**
(21) **$61.95**	(22) **$64.90**	(23) **$67.85**	(24) **$70.80**	(25) **$73.75**
(26) **$76.70**	(27) **$79.65**	(28) **$82.60**	(29) **$85.55**	(30) **$88.50**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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NEXT ISSUE...

11 stories—including

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Ben Snow)
REGINALD HILL (about a tennis match)
JAMES POWELL (about Captain Sunset)
RAOUL WHITFIELD (about a pin)
CAROL CLEMEAU (about Antonia Nielsen)
WILLIAM BANKIER (about a hockey player)
JANWILLEM van de WETERING (about Grijpstra and de Gier)

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GET 12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR $1.

GET $145.95 WORTH OF CHARTERIS, WESTLAKE, JAMES AND 9 OTHER GREAT WRITERS FOR $1.

As a new member of The Detective Book Club, you'll make your first big killing on our introductory offer: 12 of the best recently-published mysteries for $1.

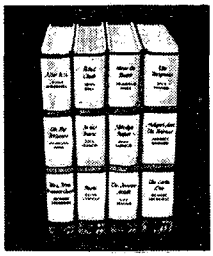
You'll savor baffling murder cases, international intrigue, innocent people caught in a web of evil, terror touched by the supernatural. All served up with the intricate plotting, bizarre twists and gripping action that are the hallmarks of the great modern masters.

Bought in a bookstore, they'd cost $145.95. But as a new member of The Detective Book Club, you get all 12 tales shown for only $1...in four handsome, hardbound, triple-volumes.

As a member, you'll get the Club's free monthly Preview, which describes in advance each month's selections. They're chosen by the Club's editors, who select the best from more than 400 mysteries published each year. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it, within 21 days; there's no minimum number of books you must buy. And you may cancel your membership at any time.

When you accept a club selection, you get three complete, full-length detective novels in one hardcover triple-volume like the ones shown on this page for only $8.95. That's $2.98 per mystery-at least $6 (and sometimes $9 or $10) less than just one costs in the publishers' original editions.

Recent selections have included new thrillers by top names like those featured here, plus Georges Simenon, Dick Francis and many others. Start enjoying the benefits of membership in The Detective Book Club. Send no money now. You'll be billed later for your 12 mysteries. Send the coupon today to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576.



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As a member, I will receive free the Club's monthly Preview, which describes my next selection. I will always have at least ten days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book sent for full credit within 21 days. For each monthly triple-volume I keep, I will send you only $8.95 plus shipping. I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

5-HV
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THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576.

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DETECTIVERSE

MORE GRAVE TONES

by JAMES HOLDING

Here's what's left of "Blaster" Lang,
Explosives man for a terrorist gang,
A maker of bombs, a dynamite buff
Who loved to charge and explode the stuff,
Ironically killed in his own back yard—
Hoist, as they say, on his own petard;
He burst an artery late last June
Trying to blow up a toy balloon.

Here lies teenager Michael Hood
Who died far earlier than he should,
Victim of a grave mistake
Only a dumb hit man could make.
Hired by a gangster, the hit man had
Orders to murder a hood named Ladd,
But the stupid hit man misunderstood
And murdered instead this lad named Hood.

Here lies a boxer, "Tank" McPound,
Who was better than any pug around
At taking dives on solid ground—
But in the water, quickly found
When he tried to take a dive, he drowned.

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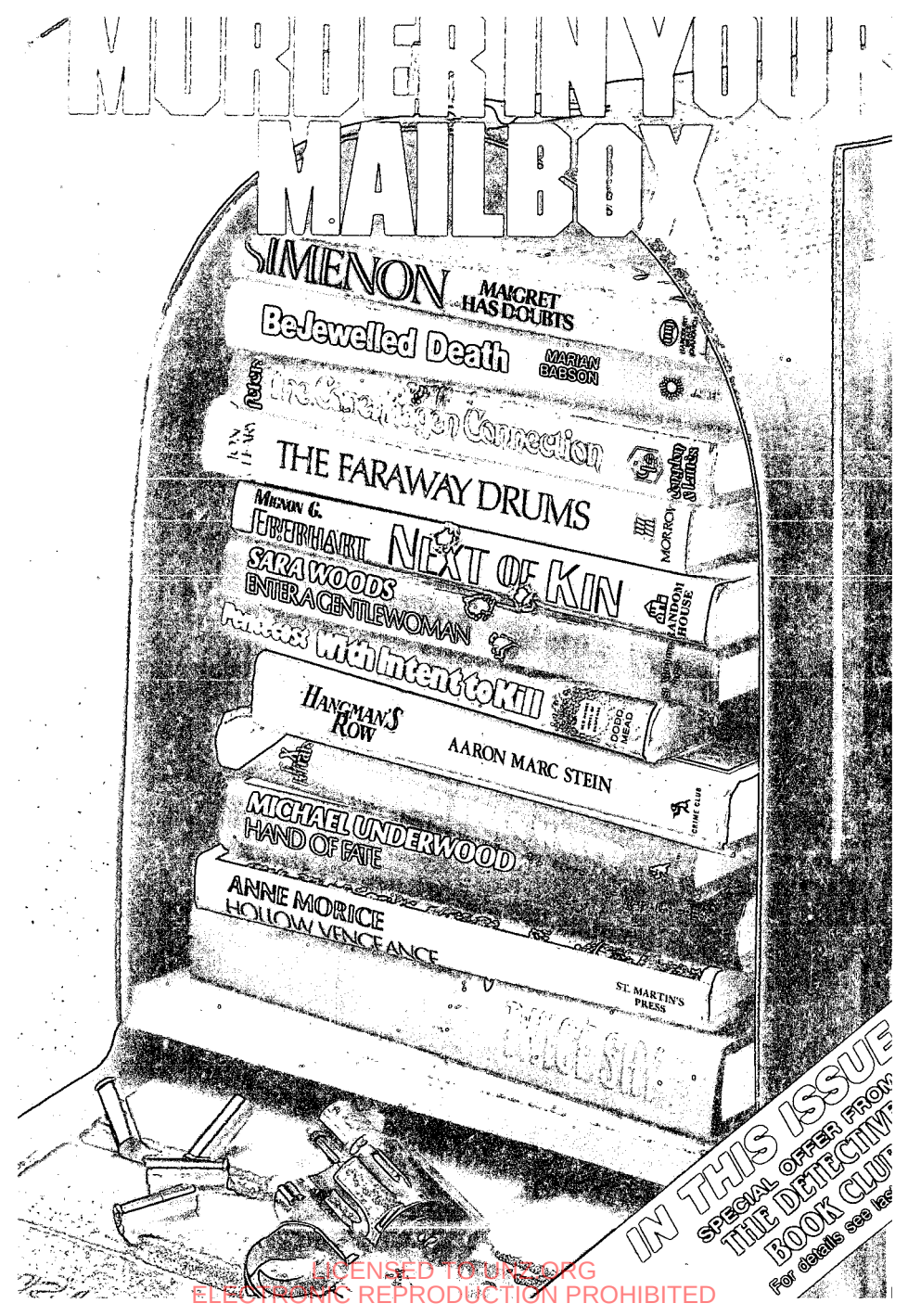

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